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# A LA MODE

(R)

(MIRAMAX)

Color/1.66

90 Mins.

Cast: Jean Yanne, Ken Higelin, Francois Hautesserre, Florence Darel, Bruce Myers, Marianne Groves, Maite Nahyr, Maurice Benichou, Arthur H. (Higelin).

Credits: Directed by Remy Duchemin. Screenplay by Richard Morgieva, Duchemin. Produced by Joel Faulon, Daniel Daujon. Director of photography: Yves Lafaye. Production design by Fouillet et Wieber. Edited by Mayline Marthieux. Costumes designed by Annie Perier. Fausto's costumes created by Philippe Guillotel. Music by Denis Barbier.

**Relentlessly cute comedy, the Gallic commercial equivalent of the high-concept/low-laugh concoctions often associated with Miramax's mother company. Only audiences that will congratulate themselves on being too intelligent for domestic product need apply.** 94-162

1964. Seventeen-year-old Fausto Barbarico (Ken Higelin) is orphaned in a cute bicycling accident. Committed to state care, he is apprenticed out to Mietek Breslauer (Jean Yanne), a Jewish tailor. Fausto finds a natural affinity for women's fashion and for publicity, and his bizarre creations quickly cause a stir and bring him to celebrity.

There's no dramatic conflict in *a la Mode* (formerly known as *Fausto*), not even comedic conflict. It's a willful fairy tale calculated to be a feel-good experience. Breslauer may wax eloquent on the artistic temperament required to make a good suit, but the filmmakers have no sense of irony, nor of duty, either, ignoring the same sage advice they purvey solely for its sentimental value. Fausto simply succeeds wherever he turns, by sheer divine destiny, and although he's intended to be irresistibly charming, one can't help speculate on how differently this same plot would play in something vaguely related to the real world.

If *a la Mode* must be sat through, it does have some modest compensations: Yanne's sleek professionalism, which commands the screen and makes any scene he's in momentarily credible; Denis Barbier's jaunty (but cute) score; and the presence of that endangered species, the true ingenue. (Florence Darel fulfills fantasy as intended, although Rohmer has used her to far wiser effect.) Then there's Bruce Myers, acolyte of Peter Brook in Paris, one of the world's great actors. He hasn't done much film work, and his part as a mechanic, father of the girl, hasn't more dimension than a mere throwaway, yet he invests everything he has into it. This kind of detail and economy of gesture and inflection belong in another movie altogether, but Myers makes you wish the film had been about his character instead. Without much useful dialogue, that's an extraordinary, if futile, achievement. Lead Higelin is also an alumnus of Brook's company, but his part is impossible, and he is impossible in it.

Certainly, director Remy Duchemin knows exactly what's he doing. If he had any authentic sense of joy, he could even have been after something profound. But his cinema of manipulation presents only fronts, and false ones at that. Narcissism as a commodity in itself is damaged goods indeed. Odd that *a la Mode* should go down so easily, it doesn't ever deliver an undiluted experience of outrage.

—M.M.

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