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IN MEMORIAM: ERIC ROHMER (1920-2010)

ROHMER'S SIX MORAL TALES

To commemorate Eric Rohmer, the elder statesman and sage of the French New Wave, who recently died at the age of 89, we present his most celebrated and enduring work: the cycle of six "Moral Tales," made over a decade extending from *La Boulangère de Monceau* (1962) through *L'Amour l'après-midi* (1972). Rohmer here established the themes and style which made him one of the most admired directors of his generation. Transforming erotic possibility into moral quandary, the six films are all struck from the same narrative template: a man, committed to one woman, finds himself attracted to a second woman, often darker, more sensual (and hence dangerous) than the first, a temptation which precipitates a moral crisis.

Rohmer serenely went his own way since the early days of the *nouvelle vague*. Older, more conservative, spiritual and bourgeois than his New Wave compatriots (Godard, Truffaut, Rivette, Chabrol), Rohmer seemed impervious to the ideological and stylistic trends of the sixties, drawing more on philosophy and literature than on politics and other movies for his inspiration.

Summer might not seem the appropriate time for imbibing lessons in ethics, but the "moralism" of these six tales is not to be confused with puritanism, nor should the films' emphasis on loquacious debate suggest severity. Witty, sun-flooded (except for the Christmas-set, nocturnal *Ma Nuit chez Maud*, as close to perfect as any film), and supremely sensual, this sextet defines sublime.

— James Quandt

Note: James Quandt's obituary essay on Eric Rohmer appeared in the March 2010 issue of *Artforum* magazine.

"One of the great film oeuvres of the century."

— Andrew Sarris

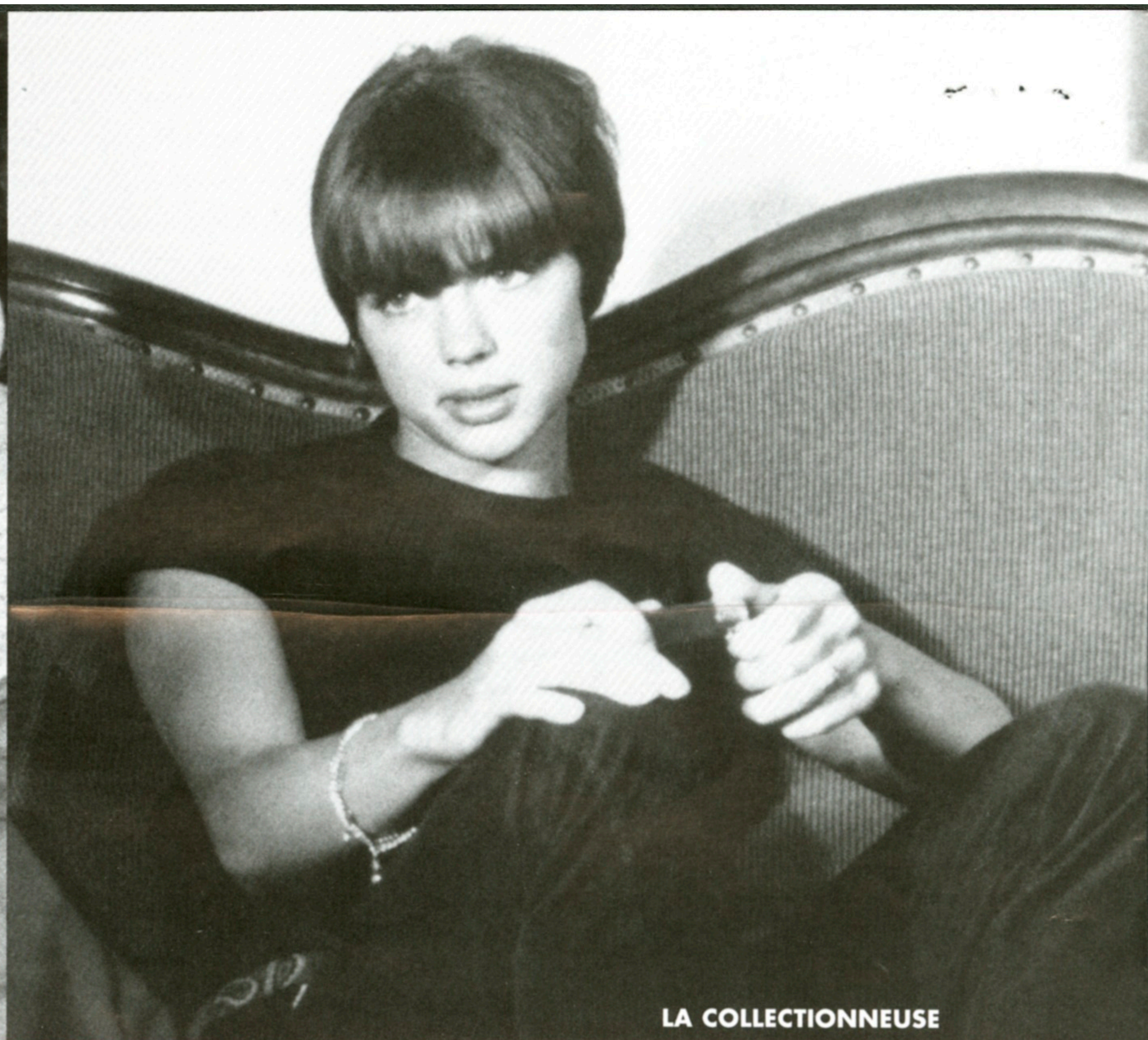
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MA NUIT CHEZ MAUD



LA COLLECTIONNEUSE

RARE ROHMERS

Tonight's programme pairs the first two of the Moral Tales, which were not widely seen in France until the mid-seventies, and have rarely been shown in Toronto.

LA CARRIÈRE DE SUZANNE

(SUZANNE'S CAREER)

Director: Eric Rohmer
France 1963 52 minutes
Cast: Catherine Sée, Philippe Beuzin

"Testifies to [Rohmer's] central position within the French New Wave" (Ginette Vincendeau). *La Carrière de Suzanne* established the pattern for Rohmer's Moral Tales: a man torn between two women, here an elegant, exotic Sophie, and sensuous Suzanne. Shy Bertrand and his cynical, philandering friend Guillaume both fall for Sophie, while working-girl Suzanne suffers their many humiliations, such as abandoning her at a nightclub for which she has paid their admission. C.G. Crisp has singled out for praise two major "set pieces" in the film, including a Gothic séance with the spirit of Don Juan, and the night Suzanne spends in an armchair in Bertrand's room, a strong prefiguration of a similar scene in *Ma nuit chez Maud*. As in so many New Wave films of the time, the documentary treatment of Parisian street, café and nightclub life is part of the film's immense allure. **PG**

Preceded by

LA BOULANGÈRE DE MONCEAU

(THE GIRL AT THE MONCEAU BAKERY)

Director: Eric Rohmer
France 1962 23 minutes
Cast: Barbet Schroeder, Michèle Girardon

Rohmer authority C.G. Crisp has claimed that this first Moral Tale is "among the most successful of the six: neat, economical and gently humorous, it exactly realizes its modest ambitions. It might not be claiming too much to see it as the most satisfying of all, with the possible exception of *Ma nuit chez Maud*. Moreover, with the second of the Tales [also on tonight's programme] it served to establish a basic imagery within which all of the succeeding Tales were to operate." The young protagonist has mentally committed himself to Sylvie, but falls for Jacqueline, "the baker girl of Monceau" of the title, who is all flesh and sensuality in comparison to Sylvie's ethereal delicacy. His struggle to choose between the two women becomes, in a template for the later Moral Tales, a choice between what Crisp calls "free will or predestination, rectitude or hypocrisy." Narrated by Bertrand Tavernier and starring director Barbet Schroeder. **PG**

Thursday, July 29 8:45 p.m.

MA NUIT CHEZ MAUD

(MY NIGHT AT MAUD'S)

Director: Eric Rohmer
France 1968 110 minutes
Cast: Jean-Louis Trintignant, Françoise Fabian, Marie-Christine Barrault

Voted the Best Foreign Film of the seventies by an international poll of film critics, *Ma nuit chez Maud* remains an imperative for all cinephiles. In Clermont-Ferrand over the Christmas season, a deeply committed Catholic (Jean-Louis Trintignant) is torn between a blonde woman he sees at church and the vivacious, intellectual (and, keeping with Rohmer's schema of medieval romance, dark) Maud—a choice which for him becomes a test of Pascal's theory of free will and chance. In Rohmer, sex is more in the chat than in the sack, so this one night stand wittily transforms erotic possibility into spiritual quandary; intercourse yields to discourse, and philosophical thrust and parry replace seduction. The result is as sexy as it is intellectually stimulating. "The real mastery of *My Night at Maud's* lies in its status as a piece of pure cinema. . . . The three key conversation scenes in the film. . . . are masterpieces of cinema" (Nick Roddick).

Friday, July 30 7:00 p.m.

Saturday, August 7 7:00 p.m. 14A

LA COLLECTIONNEUSE

Director: Eric Rohmer
France 1966 85 minutes
Cast: Haydée Politoff, Patrick Bachau

"My favourite [of Rohmer's Moral Tales] is *La Collectionneuse*. . . . Haydée Politoff's bikini-clad young collector of men, who is the fulcrum of the drama, adds an erotic frisson even *Claire's Knee* didn't manage" (Derek Malcolm, *The Guardian*). Rohmer sets his Riviera roundelay in St. Tropez, then synonymous with "swinging" sexuality. The "collector" of the title is an amoral gamine—the coltish type who often turned up in Rohmer's cinema—who sleeps with many men, sometimes leaving with a different homme than the one she returns with. Two friends—a humourless antiques dealer and a lazy, affable artist—determine not to be added to her "collection" of one-night stands. Sharing a villa for the summer, the men decide to give her a lesson in morality, but inevitably become enmeshed in sexual stratagems. Superbly shot in lush natural light by Nestor Almendros, the film became a surprise hit in France, thanks to its knowing combination of eroticism and ethics, and its superb exploitation of the Mediterranean setting, and it exerted a powerful influence on a new generation of French directors. *La Collectionneuse* is ideal summer fare: "wryly and delightfully witty" (Tom Milne, *Time Out*).

Saturday, July 31 7:00 p.m. 14A



LE GENOU DE CLAIRE

LE GENOU DE CLAIRE

(CLAIRE'S KNEE)

Director: Eric Rohmer

France 1970 103 minutes

Cast: Jean-Claude Brialy, Aurora Cornu, Béatrice Romand

"Close to a perfect movie. . . *Claire's Knee* has the qualities of pure crystal—it is original, complete, mysterious, clear" (Vincent Canby, *The New York Times*). One of cinema's supreme works about sensual obsession, Rohmer's film is the perfect tonic for summer holiday. A diplomat about to be married arrives at a lakeside resort to sell his summer home. Without his fiancée, and prodded by an old friend, a novelist called Aurore, he finds himself fixated on what has been called "one of cinema's most obscure objects of desire": the knee of a schoolgirl who is summering across the way. In Rohmer's exquisitely modulated Moral Tale, the question of whether the tormented diplomat will get to touch the coveted knee generates a sublime kind of spiritual suspense. "A charming, serene, sun-bright movie. . . A lovely film and an unusually civilized film. . . Quietly entrancing" (Pauline Kael). The National Society of Film Critics voted *Le Genou de Claire* the best film of the year.

Thursday, August 5 7:00 p.m. **14A**
Sunday, August 8 4:00 p.m.



L'AMOUR L'APRÈS-MIDI

(LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON)

Director: Eric Rohmer

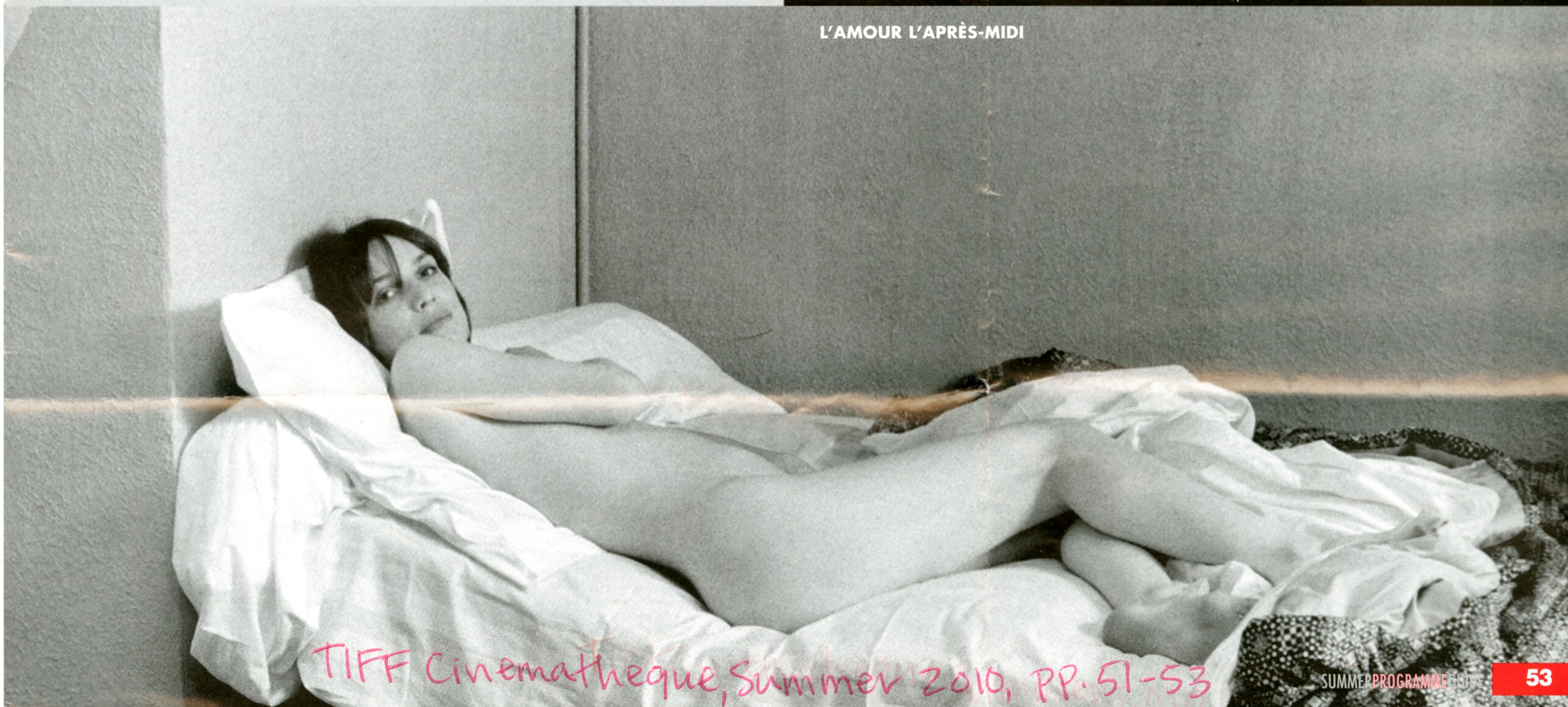
France 1972 97 minutes

Cast: Zouzou, Bernard Verley, Françoise Verley

A pitch perfect comedy of carnality, *L'Amour l'après midi* summed up the Moral Tales, wringing new and excruciating humour from the sexual/ethical quandary of its self-deluding protagonist. Once a *roué*, the hero is now happily married, but his perfectly ordered life with wife and child seems designed to hold in check an insatiable desire for the women around him. (In a celebrated fantasy sequence, a parade of women from the previous Moral Tales challenges his state of marital fidelity.) The squeamish husband meets his match in Chloé, the former mistress of a friend, who, promiscuous, volatile and unconventional, proves an almost irresistible temptation. Celebrated for its stinging insights into bourgeois propriety and for cinematographer Nestor Almendros' rapturous portrait of Paris, *L'Amour l'après midi* "caps the Moral Tales as one of the great film oeuvres of the century" (Andrew Sarris).

Friday, August 6 9:15 p.m. **14A**
Tuesday, August 10 7:00 p.m.

L'AMOUR L'APRÈS-MIDI



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