

## Document Citation

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| Title         | <b>All the fine promises</b>   |
| Author(s)     | Derek Elley  |
| Source        | <i>Variety</i>   |
| Date          | 2003 Sep 15  |
| Type          | review   |
| Language      | English  |
| Pagination    | 31   |
| No. of Pages  | 1  |
| Subjects      |  |
| Film Subjects | Toutes ces belles promesses (All the fine promises), Civeyrac, Jean-Paul, 2003 |

**ALL THE FINE  
 PROMISES**  
 (TOUTES CES BELLES  
 PROMESSES)  
 (FRANCE)

A Les Films Pelleas, Arte France presentation of a Les Films Pelleas, Versus Prods., CRRAV production. (International sales: Flach Pyramide Intl., Paris.) Produced by Philippe Martin, Lola Gans.

Directed, written by Jean-Paul Civeyrac, freely adapted from the novel "Hymnes à l'amour" by Anne Wiazemsky. Camera (color, DV-to-35mm), Celine Bozon; editor, Sylvie Fauthoux; music, extracts from works by Mendelssohn, songs by Edith Piaf; art director, Brigitte Brassart; costume designer, Anne Fournier; sound (Dolby SRD), Francois Mereu, Stephane Thiebaut; assistant director, Thomas Longuet. **Reviewed at Locarno Film Festival (Filmmakers of the Present), Aug. 9, 2003. (Also in Toronto Film Festival — Contemporary World Cinema.)** Running time: 85 MIN.

With: Jeanne Balibar, Bulle Ogier, Eva Truffaut, Renaud Becard, Valerie Crunchant, S. Prunanec, Pierre Leon, Irene Cavallaro.

By DEREK ELLEY

**W**riter-director Jean-Paul Civeyrac, virtually unknown outside his native Gaul, should start to accumulate some offshore interest with "All the Fine Promises," a thoroughly French tale of emotional closure that's lifted by some wonderful performances. The most accessible of Civeyrac's five features,

with little of the pretension that marred earlier pics ("Neither Eve nor Adam," "Man's Gentle Love"), pic is a natural contender for fests, film weeks and specialized channels.

The poised Jeanne Balibar again proves she's one of France's most underrated actresses as Marianne, a cellist in love with a violinist, Etienne (Renaud Becard), who plays in the same orchestra. Still coming to terms with her mother's death, she's further discombobulated when she discovers, going through some old family photos, that her late father had a mistress.

Ditching Etienne, whom she suspects is canoodling with the orchestra's flautist, Marianne tracks down the one-time mistress, Beatrice Marquet (Bulle Ogier), at her cliff-side home by the sea. The mildly scatty Beatrice, who's a talented pianist, is happy to talk about her long-ago affair, which lasted seven years. Marianne's father, she adds, was a real ladies' man but adored her. "He probably loved me more than I loved him," opines Beatrice frankly.

The two women get on so well that Marianne stays over. As memories of her teenhood crowd in on her, Marianne is comforted by Beatrice, her initial link to a past she's just rediscovering. Another link comes in the form of Ghislaine (Valerie Crunchant), the family's former maid, who Marianne remembers as a fun companion when she was a kid. Now a kindly, middle-aged woman, Ghislaine still cares for Marianne when the two meet again.

As Marianne puts the ghosts of her past to rest, she still has to deal with the present, repped by Etienne, who's been trying to reach her by phone ever since she ditched him in Paris. A passing affair with a young musician friend of Beatrice is no real solution, but as she arrives in Paris, where Etienne is waiting for her at the train station, Marianne comes up with a novel way of breaking free.

Initially, film has difficulty establishing a consistent tone as it juggles Marianne's problems with her mother's death and current lover with flashbacks to her late father. However, following a shift of location and the appearance of Ogier as Beatrice, pic takes on another dimension: not only do the flashbacks to various periods of Marianne's youth mesh cleverly with the present, but the chemistry between Ogier and Balibar is a huge fillip to the movie. Ogier is simply terrific, balancing maturity, warmth and mild crankiness in a stylish perf that sidesteps eccentricity.

Music plays a major role in both the characters' lives and the film's charm, and Civeyrac's use of it, both on and off-screen, smoothes over many of the more pretentious moments he's still prone to. A joyful, late sequence has Marianne and Beatrice bonding while playing a four-handed tune on a piano together; an Edith Piaf song is a key link between Beatrice and Marianne's father; and helmer Civeyrac's use on the soundtrack of chamber music by Mendelssohn gives the movie a warm glow that's especially effective in the final sequence.

Overall effect is a celebration of life and love, very different from the original source material, a novel by one-time Godard icon Anne Wiazemsky that focuses on failed love affairs. Tech credits are fine, with the transfer from DV almost unnoticeable.