

Document Citation

Title	A summer's tale
Author(s)	Todd McCarthy
Source	<i>Variety</i>
Date	
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	1
Subjects	
Film Subjects	Un conte d'été (A summer's tale), Rohmer, Éric, 1996

A SUMMER'S TALE

(CONTE D'ETE)

(FRENCH)

A Margaret Menegoz/Les Films du Losange/La Sept Cinema presentation with the participation of La Sofica Sofilmka and Canal Plus. (International sales: Les Films du Losange, Paris.) Produced by Francoise Etchegaray.

Directed, written by Eric Rohmer. Camera (color), Diane Baratier; editor, Mary Stephen; music, Philippe Eidel, Sebastien Erms; sound, Pascal Ribier. Reviewed at Cannes Film Festival (Un Certain Regard), May 19, 1996. Running time: 113 MIN.

Gaspard Melvil Poupaud
Margot Amanda Langlet
Lena Aurelia Nolin
Solene Gwenaelle Simon

"A Summer's Tale" is vintage Eric Rohmer, his most richly satisfying film in a number of outings. Precisely and fully playing out the intimate implications of a chaste *menage a quatre*, the vet French auteur may also have served up his most commercial entry in more than a decade, simply by virtue of the fact that, as in "Pauline at the Beach," the attractive young characters spend most of their time under the sun in bathing suits.

Rohmer was an arthouse mainstay from the late '60s through the end of the '80s, during which time all of his films saw U.S. distribution. His last two pics, however, have yet to surface Stateside, and the director's refined taste, literary bent and resolutely straightforward presentation clearly run counter to the razzle-dazzle and dramatic intensity expected even by the limited upscale audience for foreign films these days. Stylistically, Rohmer is a lot closer to D.W. Griffith than to Luc Besson.

But it is also true that Rohmer, now 76, persists in making films about modern young people, mostly young women still in their teens or scarcely out of them, and he makes them more intelligently and perceptively than most filmmakers considerably closer in age to their subjects. Much was made in Cannes of Bernardo Bertolucci trying to grapple with the problems of a teenager in "Stealing Beauty," while Rohmer has been doing so, with seeming ease, all along.

New item, the third in the director's "Tales of the Four Seasons" series (autumn remains to be covered), is divided into 18 dated chapters recounting events over a nearly three-week period. In a completely relaxed, confident manner, pic intros Gaspard (Melvil Poupaud), a lean, bushy-haired kid, as he arrives in the Brittany resort town of Dinard for a vacation and is quickly chatted up by a perky, bright waitress, Margot (Amanda Langlet), who, like the guitar-strumming Gaspard, holds an advanced academic degree but is

Turn to page 52

A SUMMER'S TALE

Continued from page 49

treading water before moving on with her life.

Gaspard at first seems uncommunicative, but, prodded by the endlessly inquisitive Margot, soon becomes an open book, freely confessing his feelings and, in particular, his preoccupation with Lena, a girl who is supposed to arrive soon to see him but is not, he admits, in love with him. Margot reveals that she, too, is spoken for, although her man is in the South Pacific, so the two can ease into a close platonic friendship.

But Gaspard begins seeing less of Margot after he spots the sultry Solene (Gwenaelle Simon) in a disco. Brazenly self-confident and aggressive when it comes to grabbing the men she wants, Solene both tempts and scares Gaspard, warning him that she has a policy of not sleeping with a guy right after meeting him but nonetheless inducing him to agree to take a trip with her to the nearby island of Ouessant.

Solene's interest bolsters Gaspard's ego enormously, and it looks as though he's all set for the rest of his vacation — until he unexpectedly runs into the long-awaited Lena, who has arrived in the area without even contacting the eager Gaspard.

By the time Rohmer brings the film to its deliciously agonizing climax, the malleable Gaspard has boxed himself into conflicting plans with three women. The situation presents a vivid contrast among relationships of flirtatious friendship, unrequited love and being the object of desire. Some viewers may become annoyed at Gaspard's lack of assertiveness, but the predicaments in which he finds himself are utterly believable and embarrassing, to the point of poignance.

In the telling, "A Summer's Tale" consists mostly of long scenes in which Gaspard and one of the three girls walk along the beach talking of love, attraction, desire, their feelings about life and other familiar Rohmer topics. The thoughts may not be profound, but they are profoundly true to life, and the writer-director's approach to young people's concerns is remarkably universal and timeless; utterly uninflected by the trends of music, fashion and attitude, the action here easily could be taking place at any time between the 1950s and today.

As usual, the young thespians are appealing in their unaffectedness. Poupaud makes for an amusingly diffident protagonist, Langlet supplies most of the pep, Simon comes on strong and reveals quite an appealing voice when singing a sailor's ditty Gaspard has written, and Nolin suitably embodies the so-called dream girl who is far from what anyone would rationally want in a mate.

The Brittany locations provide a picturesque and relatively unfamiliar backdrop for virtual chamber play of conflicting, confused feelings. Even if it lacks the ravishing beauty of the Rohmer films photographed by Nestor Almendros in years past, pic looks good as shot by Diane Baratier in the old 1.33-to-1 Academy format.

—Todd McCarthy