

## THE ROSE MAKER

Monday, May 16, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Chase Beck | Battleship Pretension | Not Rated | 95 Mins.

In *The Rose Maker*, Catherine Frot plays the titular character: Eve Vernet, the owner of Vernet Nursery, a small business in the French countryside begun by her father. It is a tiny farm that specializes in only growing and selling roses. Eve is a skilled hybridizer but tough times and stiff competition has led to increasingly small returns. At the beginning of the film, Eve is racing to bring her only successful hybrid to a flower judging competition. A win could bring acclaim, customers and a much-needed influx of cash. But, times are so tough for Vernet that her secretary, assistant, and only employee Véra (Olivia Côte) informs her that they did not have the money to purchase a booth, one of the main methods of attracting new clients, at the competition. Despite presenting an impressive, all-white rose bush, Eve cannot compete with Lamarzelle (Vincent Dedienne), a man who approaches rose breeding without heart or soul, paying for the best breeders and locking up promising rose breeds behind closed, hothouse doors.



Back on the farm, Eve and Véra face increasing challenges. Seizing upon opportunity, Véra manages to find three workers without costing Vernet Nursery a single centime: a work-release program courtesy of the local prison. In return for teaching these reformed criminals valuable skills, Eve can use them as free manual labor. Though unskilled and lacking in any enthusiasm, Samir (Fatsah Bouyahmed), Nadège (Marie Petiot), and Fred (Manel Foulgoc) are motivated by the freedom and potential offered by the program. At first Eve is reluctant to take on the unskilled workers but she changes her mind when she realizes their criminal skills might be exactly what she needs. Eve quickly falls upon a scheme to steal a rare rose, called "The Lion", right from under Lamarzelle's nose. With it, she hopes to hybridize a rose with the perfect characteristics: beauty and grace combined with the hearty resilience of an indigenous French breed. If her plan succeeds she could turn her business around. If they are caught they could all go to jail.

Despite its awkward, English title, *The Rose Maker* has a lot to offer. In French, the film's title translates to "The Final Flower". It is a small distinction, but the English title places Catherine Frot's character front and center whereas the French title directs audiences' attention to the flowers. I think the film works better if you center your attention on the flowers and think of the actors as satellites, spinning into and out of the plants' orbits. The film itself is an ephemeral delight. I love the all-to-brief lessons you get on rose hybridization. It makes me want to start cutting apart my rose bushes to find my own, award-winning, breeds. I do wish the three work-release laborers were given equal time and room for character development.



Instead the film focuses almost exclusively on the stories of Eve and Fred. Their character arcs are enjoyable but come at the expense of the other characters. Director Pierre Pinault's *The Rose Maker* is a light comedy that provides 95 minutes of amusement. Almost before you realize, the bloom on this rose has faded into a sepia-toned memory. Appropriately, the film is just as fleeting as a summer rose, but no less beautiful. Its transience is not a flaw but rather a feature that reminds us our memories of beauty can often outshine the actual objects upon which those memories are based. I recommend this movie to just about anyone, if only for the botanical lessons hidden within its charming story.

In French with English Subtitles.



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# ANAIS IN LOVE

Monday, May 23, 7:30 pm

Reviewed by Allan Hunter | ScreenDaily | Not Rated | 98 Mins.

As light and airy as a summer breeze, *Anais In Love* (Les Amours d'Anais) captures a portrait of a young woman impulsively navigating the unpredictable twists of life and love. Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet's elegant debut feature is pitched between the worlds of Eric Rohmer and Greta Gerwig or Agnes Jaoui. A polished, slightly old-fashioned exploration of romance, desire and the longings of an inconstant heart, it should appeal to Francophone markets and sophisticated Francophile audiences.



Noted for her shorts *Joujou* (2016) and *Pauline Enslaved* (2018), Bourgeois-Tacquet developed her first feature through the Next Step programme of Cannes Critics Week where it makes its world premiere. Reunited with actress Anais Demoustier, Bourgeois-Tacquet tells the story of a young woman who never stands still and rarely stays quiet. Anais is a hyperactive whirlwind, racing through life, eager to embrace everything it has to offer. She spends a good deal of the film in motion, running to catch up with herself, and the camerawork is equally energetic and flowing as the viewer is caught up in the giddy swirl of her existence.

Anais seems to live for the moment with little concern for the consequences. Her thesis is unfinished, her rent is overdue, her relationship is on the rocks and yet she remains a bubbly beacon of positivity trying to figure out who she is and what she really wants. The role is a fantastic showcase for Demoustier, who lights up the

screen with her boundless energy and beaming charm. There are elements of Anais that would fit a typical screwball comedy heroine; she is a little scatterbrained, self-centred and carefree to the point of appearing callous. The revelation that she is pregnant is dropped into a conversation almost as an afterthought. Demoustier's performance ensures that she remains engaging rather than exhausting.

A meeting with much older publisher Daniel (Podalydes) leads to a brief affair, but Anais finds herself much more intrigued by Daniel's wife Emilie (Tedeschi), a successful writer, novelist and essayist. Another chance encounter brings the two women together sparking a slow-burning flirtation that promises to catch fire and become something more meaningful.

Set to a Nicola Piovani score of violin and cello compositions, *Anais In Love* confidently inhabits a particular world of intellectuals, literary symposiums and philosophical conversations. Even a hotel handyman is really a playwright. Anais is writing a thesis on 17th century descriptions of passion. There are name checks for Gainsbourg and Duras, Schopenhauer and Alain Robbe-Grillet, and a cinema visit to watch Cassavetes' *Opening Night* (1977). The whole enterprise unashamedly celebrates the influence of Rohmer or Woody Allen.

The blazing sunshine and bright, warming light of Paris and Normandy add to the visual appeal of a film that feels like the holiday none of us can take at present. Elements of *Anais In Love* may feel obvious or overly familiar, but Bourgeois-Tacquet directs with assurance and stages a number of effective scenes progressing the romance between Anais and Emilie. A setting sun dance to Kim Carnes' 'Bette Davis Eyes' provides one goose bump moment.



The ever reliable Bruno Podalydes conveys the desire and discomfort of a man caught in the middle of something he doesn't fully comprehend whilst a radiant Valeria Bruni Tedeschi leaves a haunting impression as the wise, wary, gently realistic Emilie. It is one of her most relaxed, appealing performances and might just prompt some awards attention in France.

In French with English subtitles.

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**Monday, June 6, 7:30 pm**

Reviewed by Pete Hammond | Deadline | Not Rated | 130 Mins.

In movies as disparate and vividly imagined as *Il Divo*, *Loro*, the Oscar winning *The Great Beauty*, as well as English language efforts like *This Must Be The Place*, *Youth*, and his TV miniseries *The Young Pope* and *The New Pope* Paolo Sorrentino has always seemed to be a director with a large brush and even more of a Fellini influence in some cases. That is why his latest, a largely autobiographical coming of age film called *The Hand Of God* which just had its World Premiere at the Venice Film Festival, and is next headed this weekend to Telluride, is such a departure, one absent the usual flourish the director often favors. Instead is an enormously effective and touching personal memoir of growing up in Naples circa the 1980's. In many ways this is Sorrentino's *Amarcord*, *Day For Night*, *Cinema Paradiso*, *Pain And Glory*, but first and foremost a knowing and engaging film from a director ready for the first time, on film at least, to look deeply inward for inspiration.



After a disturbing opening sequence that seems to indicate a movie more of Sorrentino's past filmography than what this one becomes, the focus is directly aimed on Fabietto Schisa (newcomer Filippo Scotti), a 16 year old kid from Naples, more prone to hanging with his family and adults than those his own age, a wide-eyed innocent not really easily defined like others his age. We meet him and the immediate and extended members of the Schisa family as Sorrentino presents him going about his life obsessed by the far flung idea that soccer great Diego Maradona might be lured to join the lowly local Naples-based team, seemingly a fantasy out of reach. When 20 year old older brother Marchino (Marlon Joubert) poses a question of getting laid by their voluptuous Aunt Patrizia (Luisa Ranieri) or having Maradona play for Naples, the choice was easy for Fabietto: Maradona.

This quest for the great sports star is all the background of the film's first half which also chronicles the stuff of family including the strong bond, but sometimes rocky relationship of his parents played nicely by Sorrentino veterans Toni Servillo as Saverio and Teresa Saponangelo as Maria. Despite ups and downs this is a loving family life for Fabietto who is looking to his own future, still very much in development. When Marchino gets an opportunity to interview as an extra in a Fellini movie that has come to town he doesn't get the gig,

but it is Fabietto who peeks behind the doors of the production and we can see the seeds of his own potential future in films. A tragic accident though causes the idyllic story to take a dark turn halfway through, and as happened to Sorrentino in real life, he and his siblings (there is also a sister who is not Sorrentino's focus here but rather the butt of a running joke around the bathroom) are orphaned. It becomes a seminal moment especially for Fabietto who has a near-breakdown at the hospital that will later become the impetus for a film that comes directly from his life. In fact it is this film, and that person is Paolo Sorrentino who describes *The Hand Of God* simply as a movie of "fate, family, sports and cinema, love and loss". A perfect summation. In fact the title comes from something Maradona once said himself about a key play during the 1986 World Cup.

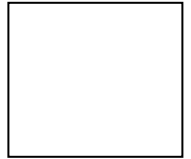
This is the first time Sorrentino has returned to Naples for one of his films since his 2001 feature directorial debut, *One Man Up*, and the city is truly a key character in the film, especially because of that period when it became the center of the Italian sports universe thanks to dreams realized from Maradona. Although not every incident with Fabietto mirrors what actually happened to Sorrentino, clearly it is all shaped by the times and his growing desire to get out and move on to a different life, especially after the loss of his parents. Some scenes stand out including one with a much, much older woman, the Baronessa Focale (memorably played by Betti Pedrazzi) in which she carefully guides him through the loss of his virginity. Another involves the real life director Antonio Capuano (played by Ciro Capano) who is making a movie there that fascinates Fabietto that leads to an almost surreal meeting of the minds between the pair as Capuano gives him a toughlove lecture on following his passions and making cinema that matters. In fact Sorrentino's mentor turned out to be Capuano, and the two also wrote a 1998 screenplay together *Polvere di Napoli*, another film with Naples at its center. Yet another unforgettable encounter is later with the aforementioned, but troubled, Aunt Patrizia who gets a visit from Fabietto when she is confined to an institution but is still capable of inspiring her nephew.

Scotti is a star in the making, perfectly balances the confusion and vulnerability of a young man at a crossroads, even if he isn't quite sure what that is. In terms of the sheer talent exhibited here he is reminiscent of an Italian Timothee Chalamet, and Sorrentino's camera clearly loves him. Joubert is also impressive as Marchino, a young man without the inherent urgency or driving needs of his younger brother and perhaps relegated to a life in Naples. Servillo and Saponangelo are wonderful together as you might expect, taking on supporting roles, as does Ranieri, intriguing and lovely as Patrizia.



Daria D'Antonia's lilting cinematography adds much to the glow of this very personal, but in its own ways very universal remembrance. *The Hand Of God* is also a reminder we are also in the hand of one of cinema's modern masters. In Italian with English subtitles.

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generously, like dew on a blush-colored petal."

--Ann Hornaday, *Washington Post*

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"Charline Bourgeois-Tacquet's elegant debut feature is  
pitched between the worlds of Eric Rohmer and Greta  
Gerwig."

--Allan Hunter, *ScreenDaily*

Monday, May 23 at 7:30 pm

A grey rectangular movie title card for 'Anaïs in Love'. The title 'ANAÏS IN LOVE' is written in large, bold, white capital letters.

"We are in the hands of one of cinema's  
modern masters."

--Pete Hammond, *Deadline*

Monday, June 6 at 7:30 pm

A grey rectangular movie title card for 'The Hand of God'. The title 'the HAND of GOD' is written in a serif font, with 'the' and 'of' in lowercase and 'HAND' and 'GOD' in uppercase.