

Karnaval

But Larbi (Amar Ben Abdallah), a second-generation Arab who works at his father's garage, has never been to the carnival, which takes place in another part of the town from where he has lived all his life with his family. This particular year, he becomes involved because he has quarreled with his father over money and has decided to leave to start a new life in sunny Marseilles. His trip is delayed when, finding the last train of the day has left, he seeks shelter from the pouring rain in the entrance to an apartment building and meets Bea (Sylvie Testud) and her husband, Christian (Clovis Cornillac). Bea and Christian have been partying at the carnival, and Christian, a security guard employed on the waterfront, is so drunk he can't climb the stairs to his apartment. Larbi helps out --- and gets a kiss from Bea for his assistance. He's instantly smitten, abandons his travel plans and hangs around the apartment, hoping to spend more time with this apparently available woman. Christian, when he sobers up, isn't amused that "Mustapha," as he derisively calls the unwelcome stranger, is pestering his wife. But Bea, who is obviously stuck in a boring marriage, heeds the advice of her girlfriend to seize the chance for an exciting , brief encounter. The next evening, when Larbi tracks her down, she makes love with the stranger. But Christian gets an inkling of what's happened, walks out on his job and drunkenly confronts his rival, with unexpected results. Bea's touching, ill-advised fling with a member of an ethnic group that is despised by her husband and his cronies is undoubtedly an exciting adventure for her, but the resulting repercussions will change her life. The film is essentially her story, and Testud is touching in the role. Unfortunately, Ben Abdallah makes Larbi rather bland, not really worthy of Bea's love. By far the most interesting character in the film is Christian, and the powerful performance of Cornillac as the blustering, foul-tempered, chauvinistic white-trash husband is riveting; whenever he's onscreen, the film connects powerfully. The other star of the film is the carnival itself, which is quite a sight; the grainy photography of Dominique Bouilleret beautifully captures the unique spirit of this rather amazing event. The numerous traditional songs performed by the drunken revelers provide a strong musical commentary. (The unusual spelling of the film's title is deliberate.) In his debut, Vincent demonstrates a firm grasp of character and nuance, and an ability to place his protagonists firmly in a strikingly realized environment. But animal lovers should be warned of a rather nasty scene involving a guard dog.

By [DAVID STRATTON](#)



With: Larbi - Amar Ben Abdallah Bea - Sylvie Testud Christian - Clovis Cornillac Isabelle - Martine Godart Pine - Jean-Paul Rouve Gigi - Thierry Bertein Dorianne - Dominique Baeyens

Against the vividly colorful background of a traditional working-class carnival held each winter in the Channel port of Dunkirk, France, a young wife and mother reach a crisis in Thomas Vincent's bracing first feature. At first glance, the story of a fleeting infidelity is familiar and slight, possibly working against the film's commercial chances. But there's actually considerable substance to this finely crafted pic, which could easily find a place at fests and on specialized TV webs in coming months.

The background to the film is all-important. Each year, throughout the month of February, the people of Dunkirk, a drab town that was badly damaged during World War II, enjoy a traditional carnival whose origins date back to the early 19th century. The event is essentially a blue-collar excuse for extended partying, drinking and community singing, its participants dressing in colorful costumes (the men invariably in drag). Many workers take time off to enjoy the activities.

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PRODUCTION: An MK2 release of an ADR Prods. (Paris)/Compagnie Mediterranee du Cinema, Thelma Film (Geneva)/RTBF (Brussels) production. (International Sales: MK2 Diffusions, Paris.) Produced by Alain Rozanes, Pascal Verroust. Directed by Thomas Vincent. Screenplay, Vincent, Maxime Sassier.

CREW: Camera (color), Dominique Bouilleret; editor, Pauline Dairou; music, Krischna Levy; production designer, Andre Fonsny; sound (Dolby), Regis Leroux; assistant director, Phillippe Larue; casting, Nathalie Cheron. Reviewed at Berlin Film Festival (competing), Feb. 11, 1999. Running time: 88 MIN.

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