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JACQUES ROZIER CHRONICLER OF SUMMER



His first retrospective outside of France proves Jacques Rozier (1926–2023) not only one of the essential voices of the New Wave but also a comedic master whose small yet rich body of work remains ripe for rediscovery. Starting with *Adieu Philippe*, his 1962 feature debut, Rozier was determined to explode conventional story forms, combine seemingly incompatible genres and tones, and gleefully stretch his characters' possibilities to their breaking points. Overlooked upon its initial release, *Adieu* has since been hailed as a seminal exemplar of the French New Wave's youthful energy and experimentation, though Rozier's four other, lesser-known features—*Near Orouët* (1971), *The Castaways of Turtle Island* (1976), *Maine-Océan Express* (1986), and *Fifi Martingale* (2001)—are just as startling for their emotional complexity, satirical insight, narrative mischief, and humorous, self-reflective examinations of the extemporaneous and revivifying nature of creativity. Long overshadowed by the films of his peers, Rozier's core work can now be seen as revealing a brilliant and distinctive cinematic vision.

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FILM SYNOPSES

Adieu Philippine

France | 1962 | 111 minutes | Black & White | In French, Italian, and Corsican with English subtitles | 1.66:1 aspect ratio

In his bold yet playful feature debut—an overlooked gem of the French New Wave—Jacques Rozier satirizes several major cultural currents of early-sixties France: political myopia, romantic escapism, and commercial corruption. Young Michel (Jean-Claude Aimini) works as a camera technician for a television studio, where he meets two would-be actresses, Liliane (Yveline Céry) and Juliette (Stefania Sabatini). The duo’s demeaning work in advertising allows them to connect Michel with an unscrupulous director (Vittorio Caprioli), who subsequently stiffes him on a job. Fed up with their exploitative industry, Michel, Liliane, and Juliette head to Corsica for a holiday—and to track down the director—all while a developing love triangle strains the girls’ friendship. With confidence and panache, Rozier expertly employs documentary-style shooting, improvisational acting (among a mostly nonprofessional cast), and kinetic montage sequences to capture the disparity between blithe youth and the societal pressures—especially Michel’s imminent military service in Algeria—that threaten its innocence.



Adieu Philippine

Near Orouët

France | 1971 | 150 minutes | Color | In French with English subtitles | 1.37:1 aspect ratio

In early September, three young Parisians—Caroline (Caroline Cartier), her cousin Kareen (Françoise Guégan), and Joëlle (Danièle Croisy)—travel to the sparsely populated shorefront town of Orouët for a carefree holiday. At the house of Caroline’s mother, the trio soon take in Joëlle’s boss Gilbert (Bernard Ménez), and romantic complications inevitably ensue: ever the schlemiel, Gilbert suffers subtle humiliations at the women’s hands in order to remain close to Joëlle, his crush, while Joëlle develops feelings for Patrick (Patrick Verde), a handsome, sporty neighbor who in turn flirts with Kareen. Rozier constructs his love triangle (or, rather, square) without an ounce of melodrama, focusing as much on the vacation’s languorous atmosphere—and its giddy effect on the friends’ inside jokes and childish slapstick—as on the slow-burn plot. Perfectly capturing both the liberating promise and the melancholic effervescence of summer, *Near Orouët* is a minor masterpiece of the post-New Wave era and a beautiful meditation on the fleeting nature of youth, love, and time.



Near Orouët

The Castaways of Turtle Island

France | 1976 | 146 minutes | Color | In French with English subtitles | 1.66:1 aspect ratio

Having set his first two features on seaside holidays, Rozier used the third, *The Castaways of Turtle Island*, to mock the tourist industry and the “going native” movement that was then increasing



The Castaways of Turtle Island

in popularity among Western vacationers. Things quickly go south when travel agents Jean-Arthur (Pierre Richard) and Joël (Maurice Risch) offer a fend-for-yourself getaway on a deserted island, with their agency making them accompany clients through deep jungle and across barely charted waters to reach a destination that could give Robinson Crusoe a run for his money. Joël enlists younger brother Bernard (Jacques Villeret) to go in his place, but Jean-Arthur isn't so lucky, and soon devolves into a semimad purist who will settle for nothing less than the ultimate in survivalist adventure; meanwhile, a motley crew of sightseers becomes divided over how real this shipwreck holiday should be. Far ahead of its time in its satirical targets and its mixing of disparate narrative tones, *Turtle Island* is a hilarious comic send-up that could only have emerged from Rozier's puckish imagination.

Maine-Océan Express

France | 1986 | 136 minutes | Color | In French, Portuguese, Spanish, and English with English subtitles | 1.66:1 aspect ratio

By land, by sea, by air . . . In Rozier's quirkiest comedy, a Brazilian dancer's (Rosa-Maria Gomes) invalid train ticket for a journey from Paris to Saint-Nazaire sparks a shaggy-dog story that encompasses the adventures of a quick-tempered boatman (Yves Afonso), his highfalutin attorney (Lydia Feld), a scheming talent agent (Pedro Armendáriz Jr.), and several other memorable characters as they converge and disperse via various modes of transportation throughout a series of unpredictable coincidences. With the boundlessness of human adaptability as its lodestar, *Maine-Océan Express* covers a delirious swath of

narrative ground, including the roundabout path that returns a hapless train conductor (Bernard Ménez) to his duties after he joins an impromptu samba session and nearly becomes "the next Maurice Chevalier." Applying his long-take shooting style to a plot of episodic, anarchic zaniness, Rozier once more proves himself a master of making the patently absurd appear completely realistic, and vice versa.

Fifi Martingale

France | 2001 | 120 minutes | Color | In French with English subtitles | 1.85:1 aspect ratio

Rozier's final film is a joyful compendium of his major themes and strategies as well as one of the funniest depictions of the theater ever committed to celluloid. When a director (Mike Marshall) decides—out of superstition—to overhaul his play after a successful six-month run, he unwittingly instigates changes that appear to doom the production. Enter, by pure coincidence, Gaston (Jean Lefebvre), a friend of the star, Fifi (Lydia Feld as Lili Vonderfeld), and the possessor of a near-perfect memory that allows him to quickly assume one of the major roles. Everything seems to fall into place until Gaston gambles his advance to raise money for his own struggling theatrical company, loses his recall abilities, and becomes the target of revenge by the man he replaced onstage (Yves Afonso). Filled to the brim with punning wordplay, theatrical allusions, and the delicious chaos of backstage maneuvering, *Fifi Martingale* is perhaps Rozier's finest comedic take on the wild digressions and nick-of-time improvisations that make up both art and life.



JACQUES ROZIER

BIOGRAPHY

Jacques Rozier was born in Paris on November 10, 1926.

A graduate of the Institute for Advanced Film Studies, the burgeoning director cut his teeth in the industry as a television and film assistant while making his first shorts, *Back to School* (1955) and *Blue Jeans* (1958). In 1962, Rozier received financing for *Adieu Philippine*, his feature debut, in the wake of successes by French New Wave colleagues like Jean-Luc Godard and François Truffaut. Yet *Adieu*—which would establish the template for Rozier’s unique brand of loose, rambling narratives—proved a box-office failure despite a Cannes Film Festival premiere; ringing endorsements from Godard, Truffaut, Eric Rohmer, and Jacques Rivette; and critical acclaim from the influential journal *Cahiers du cinéma* (which placed a still from the film on the cover of its “Nouvelle Vague” issue). Rozier’s career never fully recovered, but in the decades since its original release, *Adieu* has been reappraised as one of the New Wave’s finest titles, deserving attention alongside Godard’s *Breathless* or Truffaut’s *The 400 Blows*.

Rozier spent almost a decade directing shorts and episodes for French television, until 1971, when he helmed his second feature, *Near Orouët*. Evoking the afterglow of both the New Wave and France’s tumultuous 1968 student and worker uprisings, *Orouët* follows a trio of young women on a summer vacation where their coy flirtations with a pair of men vanquish the laid-back mood. It took two years for the film to land theatrical distribution after its Cannes premiere, and even then, Rozier’s penchant for gradually simmering dramedy mystified the public. Rozier was once again vindicated years later, however, when critics like Richard Brody heralded the film as an under-the-radar triumph: “With his blend of delicate understatement and raucous spontaneity, Rozier may be the most secretly influential director of the era.”

Several years passed until Rozier directed his third feature, *The Castaways of Turtle Island*, a satire of the tourist industry. More television work followed, and in 1986, Rozier shot *Maine-Océan Express*, the apex of his fondness for everything-but-the-kitchen-sink films and another love letter to the charms of coastal France. A short that Rozier made in 1995 is ironically titled *How to Become a Filmmaker Without the Hassle*, a winking acknowledgement of the hard roads he had to travel to realize his artistry. Indeed, it took fifteen more years after *Maine-Océan* for Rozier to direct his fifth and final feature, *Fifi Martingale*, a backstage comedy that (with exceptional joie de vivre) expounds upon the concepts—chance, coincidence, improvisation, malleability—that defined his creative work.

Rozier died in Théoule-sur-Mer on May 31, 2023. After the passing of Agnès Varda in 2019 and Godard in 2022, he was the last surviving filmmaker of the French New Wave.



FILMOGRAPHY

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| 1955 | <i>Back to School (Rentrée des classes)</i> (short) |
| 1958 | <i>Blue Jeans</i> (short) |
| 1962 | <i>Adieu Philippine</i> |
| 1963 | <i>Dans le vent</i> (documentary short) |
| 1964 | <i>Paparazzi</i> (documentary short) |
| | <i>Le parti des choses: Bardot et Godard</i> (documentary short) |
| | <i>Jean Vigo</i>
(for the television series <i>Cinéastes de notre temps</i>) |
| 1965 | Various episodes for the television series <i>Dim Dam Dom</i> |
| | Episodes 5 and 8 for the television series <i>Ni figue ni raisin</i> |
| | <i>Les Parisiennes: “C’est tout de même malheureux”</i>
(music video) |
| 1966 | <i>Roméos et jupettes</i> (short) |
| 1968 | Various episodes for the television series
<i>Au coeur de la musique</i> |
| 1971 | <i>Near Orouët (Du côté d’Orouët)</i> |
| 1972 | Episode 2 for the television series <i>Vive le cinéma!</i> |
| 1976 | <i>The Castaways of Turtle Island</i>
(<i>Les naufragés de l’île de la Tortue</i>) |
| | <i>Nono Nénesse</i> (short) |
| 1979 | <i>Marketing Mix</i>
(for the television series <i>Contes modernes</i>) |
| 1983 | <i>Lettre de la Sierra Morena</i>
(for the television series <i>Cinéma cinémas</i>) |
| 1984 | <i>Oh, oh, oh, jolie tournée!</i>
(documentary short, completed in 2001) |
| 1986 | <i>Maine-Océan Express</i> |
| 1990 | Episodes 1–4 for the television series <i>Joséphine en tournée</i> |
| 1992 | <i>Revenez plaisirs exilés!</i> |
| 1995 | <i>How to Become a Filmmaker Without the Hassle</i>
(<i>Comment devenir cinéaste sans se prendre la tête</i>) (short) |
| 2001 | <i>Fifi Martingale</i> |