



JANUS FILMS *presents*

ERIC ROHMER'S TALES OF THE FOUR SEASONS



A Tale of Springtime · A Tale of Winter
A Tale of Summer · A Tale of Autumn

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DIRECTOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Eric Rohmer was born Maurice Schérer in Tulle, France, on March 21, 1920. Prior to discovering his love for the cinema in the late 1940s, he earned a degree in history, worked as a schoolteacher and freelance journalist, and wrote a novel under the name Gilbert Cordier. At Henri Langlois's Cinémathèque française in Paris, he not only immersed himself in movies but also forged alliances with fellow cinephiles who would form the backbone of the French New Wave: François Truffaut, Jean-Luc Godard, Jacques Rivette, and Claude Chabrol; the last was Rohmer's collaborator on the first book-length study of Alfred Hitchcock. Rohmer, who went on to serve as editor of the influential *Cahiers du cinéma* from 1957 to 1963, created his lasting pseudonym from the names of two artistic heroes: Austrian director Erich von Stroheim and English novelist Sax Rohmer.

Although one of the last representatives of the New Wave to direct a feature film (*Le signe du Lion*, 1962) and obtain significant critical notice, Rohmer became increasingly prolific and earned plaudits throughout the 1960s and 1970s, when he produced the full cycle of his Six Moral Tales. The 1980s saw Rohmer direct Comedies and Proverbs, another six-film cycle, while in the 1990s he completed his last series, Tales of the Four Seasons. Other notable productions from his fifty-seven-year directorial career—which also encompassed theater and television—include *The Marquise of O* (1976), *Perceval le Gallois* (1978), *The Lady and the Duke* (2001),

and *The Romance of Astrea and Celadon* (2007). At various points, Rohmer was awarded the Cannes Film Festival Grand Prix, the Venice Film Festival Golden Lion, and the National Society of Film Critics Award for best film, among many other honors. Rohmer passed away in 2010 at the age of eighty-nine. His economical style of independent filmmaking, as well as his humanist depictions of ethical quandaries and romantic relationships, continues to influence filmmakers the world over. •



TALES OF THE FOUR SEASONS

Tales of the Four Seasons was the final film series by Eric Rohmer, previously responsible for two of cinema's most famous cycles: Six Moral Tales, and Comedies and Proverbs. Set in different locations within France (Paris and its suburbs, Nevers, Brittany, the Rhône Valley), each installment of Four Seasons—*A Tale of Springtime* (1990), *A Tale of Winter* (1992), *A Tale of Summer* (1996), and *A Tale of Autumn* (1998)—presents with compelling drama and deft humor a variation on Rohmer's signature thematic preoccupations: the frustration of romantic desire, the difficulty of communication, and the necessity of maintaining faith and ethical integrity in conflicts wrought by pride, ego, or misunderstanding.

A TALE OF SPRINGTIME (1990)

In the first film of Tales of the Four Seasons, a burgeoning friendship between philosophy teacher Jeanne (Anne Teyssèdre) and pianist Natacha (Florence Darel) is strained by jealousy, suspicion, and intrigue. Natacha encourages Jeanne to pursue the former's father, Igor (Hugues Quester), in order to supplant Eve (Eloïse Bennett), the young girlfriend Natacha loathes. Natacha's scheme, however, risks alienating those closest to her as well as entangling Jeanne in a romantic drama she has vowed to avoid. *A Tale of Springtime* demonstrates Rohmer in full command of subtle visual storytelling as he contrasts the brightness of his characters' Parisian and suburban surroundings with their conflicting desires, ideas, and temperaments.



A Tale of Springtime

A TALE OF WINTER (1992)

The second installment of *Tales of the Four Seasons* is among the most spiritual and emotional films of Rohmer's storied career. Five years after losing touch with Charles (Frédéric van den Driessche), the love of her life and the father of her young daughter, Félicie (Charlotte Véry) attempts to choose between librarian Loïc (Hervé Furic), who lives in the Parisian suburbs, and hairdresser Maxence (Michel Voletti), who has recently moved to Nevers. In the midst of indecision, Félicie holds to an undying faith that a miracle will reunite her with Charles, a faith that Rohmer examines in all of its religious dimensions and philosophical ramifications.



A Tale of Winter

A TALE OF SUMMER (1996)

According to Rohmer, the third film of *Tales of the Four Seasons* is his “most personal vehicle.” Based on events from Rohmer's youth, *A Tale of Summer* follows amateur musician Gaspard (Melvil Poupaud) to a seaside resort in Dinard, on the coast of Brittany. There, each of three women (Amanda Langlet, Gwenaëlle Simon, and Aurelia Nolin) offers the possibility of romance, but Gaspard's inability to commit to just one puts all of his chances at love in jeopardy. *Summer* features Rohmer's wistful observations on indecisiveness and the fickle nature of desire, as brought to life by a talented young cast in a picturesque setting.



A Tale of Summer

A TALE OF AUTUMN (1998)

The concluding installment of the *Tales of the Four Seasons* tetralogy is a breezy take on the classic American romantic comedies that influenced Rohmer and his New Wave peers. Set in the Rhône Valley and taking full advantage of its golden vineyards, *A Tale of Autumn* concerns simultaneous schemes to find a new love for reserved winegrower and widow Magali (Béatrice Romand). While Magali's son's girlfriend (Alexia Portal) attempts to pair her with a former professor and lover (Didier Sandre), Magali's friend Isabelle (Marie Rivière) assumes a false identity in order to lure eligible bachelor Gérald (Alain Libolt). The misunderstandings that follow are pure Rohmer in revealing the humor of human folly and foibles.



A Tale of Autumn

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Tales of the Four Seasons began for Eric Rohmer with a simple yet inspired idea: a quartet of films based on the annual cycle of seasons. This marked a departure from Rohmer's previous film series, *Six Moral Tales* (1963–72) and *Comedies and Proverbs* (1981–87): whereas subjects for those films were carefully predetermined to lend each cycle thematic consistency, with *Tales of the Four Seasons* the director was, as he explained to Gérard Legrand and François Thomas of *Positif*, “looking for thematic contrasts, trying to proceed by differences rather than resemblance.” In his late sixties, and with thirty films under his belt at the time of conceiving *Four Seasons*, Rohmer had long become comfortable with—and yet was still excited by—well-trodden romantic, social, and ethical themes that he could now subtly refine. “As my films advance,” Rohmer explained, “it's obvious that themes will get repeated and developed . . . The area

in which one evolves becomes increasingly narrow, themes that seemed secondary become more important, and I'm going to carry on developing things that I believed to be exhausted.”

Fittingly, *Tales of the Four Seasons* begins with *A Tale of Springtime* (1990), the season associated with rebirth, and for it Rohmer rediscovered artistic facets that he had not explored in many years. Because of his reawakened interest in philosophy, Rohmer not only made lead character Jeanne (Anne Teyssède) a teacher of the subject, but he also centered the film's story on the philosophical tenet of transcendental idealism—thinking “in its pure form,” as he put it. Rohmer wanted to depict Jeanne's thought process as she struggles to maintain distance from a conflict among new friend Natacha (Florence Darel); Natacha's father, Igor (Hugues Quester); and Igor's young girlfriend,

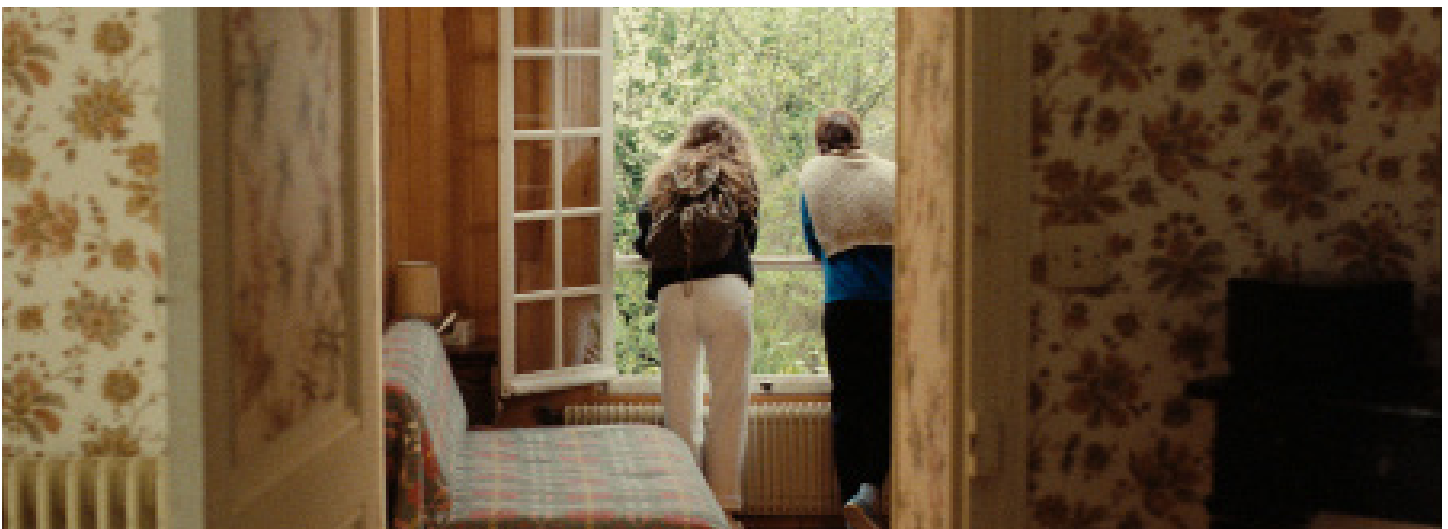
Eve (Eloïse Bennett). In realizing this dynamic, Rohmer chose Teyssède because of her ability to project impartiality and her ability to talk with ease about philosophical concepts. In fact, Teyssède inspired the story of *Springtime* when she told Rohmer that she'd love to put her degree in philosophy to use for once in her career. Similarly, Rohmer gave the role of sensitive musician Natacha to Darel because she could play the piano. Such casting was consistent with Rohmer's career-long strategy of superimposing reality onto fiction.

For *A Tale of Springtime*, Rohmer emphasized bright and verdant colors in the film's Parisian and suburban settings. But for *A Tale of Winter* (1992), he did otherwise, muting the film's palette and using a gritty 16 mm format to record an especially drab holiday season in Paris, the Parisian suburbs, and Nevers. A bleak Christmastime both offset and reinforced the story's quasi-religious theme of keeping faith through uncertainty, a subject that resonated with Rohmer when he watched a BBC production of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. Rohmer included a version of the play within his own *Winter* by shooting a performance at the Théâtre du Rond-Point in Paris and then filming reaction shots of an audience in Saint-Denis's Théâtre Gérard Philipe. Among the spectators is Félicie (Charlotte Véry), whose profound response to Queen Hermione's resurrection contrasts with that of Loïc (Hervé Furic), who scoffs at its implausibility. Véry's real-life personality accentuated the different reactions: Rohmer chose the actor for her malapropisms and informal mannerisms, particularities of language and gesture that supplement Félicie's ingenuous belief in the supernatural and impart her intellectual incompatibility with "egghead" Loïc. Once more the actual overlapped with the narrative: Véry collaborated with Rohmer on Félicie's dialogue, while Rohmer relied on Véry's professional knowledge as a makeup artist to shape Félicie's background in hairdressing.

Whereas in *Winter* Félicie has trouble committing to Loïc or Maxence (Michel Voletti) out of loyalty to her long-lost love, *A Tale of Summer* (1996) depicts indecision based on the capriciousness of youth. For this tale, Rohmer sought to depict

summer-holiday incidents from his adolescence in Tulle, in central France, but he set the film in sunny Brittany, as protagonist Gaspard (Melvil Poupaud) attempts to choose among three women (Amanda Langlet, Gwenaëlle Simon, and Aurelia Nolin) while on vacation in Dinard. Although his films typically have the appearance of improvisation, Rohmer was a meticulous planner and prepared for *Summer* with cinematographer Diane Baratier and sound engineer Pascal Ribier by spending a year researching schedules of tides, sunlight, and any other information relevant to directing in mostly public, outdoor locations. The young cast included cinematic newcomers and veterans: Poupaud had previously acted in films by Raúl Ruiz and Jean-Jacques Annaud; stage and television actress Simon was making her feature-film debut; Langlet had starred in Rohmer's *Pauline at the Beach* thirteen years before.

A Tale of Autumn (1998) featured another reunion, this time between Rohmer and frequent collaborators Marie Rivière and Béatrice Romand. Both actresses had starred in Rohmer's 1986 masterpiece *The Green Ray*, but in roles diametrically opposite to the ones they play in *Autumn*: in *Ray*, Rivière was shy and Romand aggressively social; in *Autumn*, Romand acts the wallflower and Rivière the friend who encourages her to break out of isolation. Rohmer decided on the setting for *Autumn* when colleague (and eventual writer-director) Florence Rauscher told him about the picturesque vineyards of the Rhône Valley, and Rohmer based Romand's character Magali on Sabine Gossens, manager of the Rauscher family winery. Film-festival organizers Martine and Fabien Limonta also assisted Rohmer by lending their Saint-Paul-Trois-Châteaux home for the film's climactic marriage sequence, as well as inspiring Rohmer to use details from their lives to flesh out those of his characters. Once considered for the role of Igor in *Springtime*, Alain Libolt was chosen to play Magali's possible love interest Gérald, and Rohmer allowed the actor to adapt his dialogue to make it sound less formal. Not surprisingly, Rohmer let Romand and Rivière—actors with a combined fourteen appearances in his other films—infuse their characters with "inoffensive initiatives": Rivière enjoyed revealing her bare legs, while Romand renamed her character's son Leo. ●



A Tale of Springtime

TRIVIA

A Tale of Winter was intended to be the first film of Tales of the Four Seasons but was set aside for *A Tale of Springtime* because of the perceived difficulties for the former film's distribution.

During the shooting of *Springtime*, Anne Teyssède went against Eric Rohmer's requests by cutting her hair, smoking, and using a cheat sheet in order to drive.

For *Winter*, Rohmer mailed two versions of a letter with slightly different addresses to discover if one of them would meet the same fate as the letter from Charles (Frédéric van den Driessche) that fails to reach Félicie (Charlotte Véry).

Rohmer went outside his naturalistic comfort zone for *Winter* by shooting in a rented rather than a real, operating bus for the film's penultimate sequence. He was also forced to film this sequence first in the shooting schedule—Rohmer liked to shoot his films' sequences in chronological order.

Rohmer filmed *Winter*'s car sequence from the back seat, with his sound engineer lying in the trunk.

Winter's prologue music was written and played on piano by Rohmer and editor Mary Stephen (and credited to her under a pseudonym).

For *Winter*, Véry picked van den Driessche out of a catalog of actors' profiles; she also chose Hervé Furic and Michel Voletti.

Actor Jean-Luc Revol served as Rohmer's informal assistant for *Winter* and made available to the film some of the people and places he knew in Nevers, including his aunt's hair salon.

Anne-Sophie Rouvillois, a young woman who one day had happened to show up in Rohmer's office, and her indecisiveness inspired the character of Félicie. (Rohmer had initially given *Winter* the title *The Indecisive Woman*.) The film's prologue was shot at Rouvillois's home in June 1989, on the Île-aux-Moines in the Gulf of Morbihan in Brittany.

Rohmer recorded conversations with Rouvillois and then wrote the script for *A Tale of Summer* by trying out various combinations of a male and three female characters.

Actor and writer Alain Guellaff introduced Rohmer to the Dinard region of Brittany—an area not far from Paramé, where Rohmer had married Thérèse Barbet in 1957—by introducing him to sites and people for possible inclusion in *Summer*.

While directing *Summer*, the notoriously secretive Rohmer concealed his identity with sunglasses and a face-covering kerchief from the crowds who gathered to witness the shoot. He also kept apart from the rest of the crew, signaling "Action!" from a distance.

To limit the use of boom microphones for *Summer*'s beach scenes, high-frequency microphones were strategically placed in actors' costumes or, in the case of Aurelia Nolin, their long hair.

Summer's beach sequences also forced Rohmer to use an atypical luxury: a dolly, which he pushed himself.

A fake *crêperie* created for the shoot of *Summer* became the subject of a complaint to the police by a real local *crêperier*. Producer Françoise Etchegaray helped make peace as Rohmer stood to the side, laughing with amusement.

Summer's "sea chantey" was written by Rohmer himself and arranged by Mary Stephen. For the song, Rohmer consulted *Summer* composer Philippe Eidel on Celtic rock music. Melvil Poupaud transcribed the song for guitar in order to perform it in the film.

Tension resulted on the set of *A Tale of Autumn* when Béatrice Romand wished to impose her organic diet on the cast and crew. Rohmer used this tension for the contentious car scene between Romand's and Alain Libolt's characters.

Rohmer shot many of the extras in *Autumn*'s wedding scene while they were unaware he was doing so, in order to lend the scene authenticity.

Rohmer gave the role of Leo in *Autumn* to Stéphane Darmon, an inexperienced actor with a southern-French accent that would offset the Parisian accents of the rest of the cast.

LINKS

[Fiona Handyside, "Love and Desire in Eric Rohmer's 'Comedies and Proverbs' and 'Tales of the Four Seasons,'" *Senses of Cinema* 54 \(April 2010\)](#)

[Max Nelson, "Review: A Summer's Tale," *Film Comment* \(June 20, 2014\)](#)

[David Parkinson, "Eric Rohmer for Beginners," *British Film Institute* \(January 11, 2018\)](#)

[Andrew Sarris, "Patient Virtue: Eric Rohmer Remembered," *Film Comment* \(March–April 2010\)](#)

[Guilherme Spada, "Rohmer en Scene: An Analysis of Eric Rohmer's Mise-en-Scène," *Papiro & Mint* \(April 13, 2019\)](#)