



THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY

POPULAIRE

Production Notes



Publicity materials are available at:
twcpublicity.com

Running Time: 111 minutes
MPAA Rating: 'R' rating for "a scene of sexuality"

Synopsis

A young, small-town office worker is catapulted to instant fame when her talent at the keyboard makes her a contender for the title “Fastest Typist in the World” in **POPULAIRE**, a delightful French homage to the playful romantic comedies of the 1950s.

Shy and awkward Rose Pamphyle (Déborah François) dreams of being a secretary, but in Normandy in 1958, life beyond the confines of wife and mother seems impossible. Determined to succeed on her own terms, Rose leaves her quaint village for the nearby town of Lisieux, where her nimble two-fingered typing prompts local insurance agent Louis Échard (Romain Duris) to hire her as his assistant.

Disorganized, clumsy and absent-minded, Rose proves to be a disaster as secretary, but a *savant* as a typist, even just pecking away with two fingers. The fiercely competitive Louis insists that she enter in a speed-typing contest if she wants to keep her job. Installing himself as her coach, he relentlessly drives her toward becoming the fastest typist in France—perhaps even the world!

But as the timid small town girl becomes a world-class contender under Louis’ tutelage, Rose realizes what she really wants and goes for it with the same verve and energy she brings to the keyboard. An effervescent comedy about a little-known, real-life sport, **POPULAIRE** evokes a period that became a turning point in the working lives of women around the world with the sly humor, vibrant color and spirited music of the era.

A CONVERSATION WITH RÉGIS ROINSARD (Director)

This is your first full-length feature. What's your background?

I've always wanted to tell stories through images and at school I used to photograph the kids who were considered weird. To be honest, I must have been one of them since I spent all my time recording films from television so I could dissect them later. I studied cinema, then did many different jobs in film: grip, sets, sound, etc. I wanted to confront the technical realities of filmmaking. I shot my first short early on, then three more, then ads, promos and music-related documentaries for singers like Jean-Louis Murat, Jane Birkin and Luke. These were commissions but they became mine, and my intention was always to make a full-length feature film. If I took my time it's because I was waiting for the right story to come along.

How did the idea of a speed typing competition come to you?

In 2004 I came across a documentary about the history of typewriters, which included a very short sequence showing speed typing competitions. These thirty short seconds were so fascinating that I saw their potential right away. I immediately drafted the main story lines. This world of the typewriter seemed crazy to me. I thought it was incredible that it could have become a sport and I was captivated by the rapport between man and machine. At first I only had the young female champion character; the male character didn't exist. But I'd already imagined her to be from a small village and had given her the name of one of my grandmothers. I should add that, like Rose, I come from a small town in Normandy and that Paris represented the big metropolis, out of my reach.

How did you gather information from that point on?

I started to research the 'sport' of speed typing, and the schools that taught typing and shorthand. This was back in 2004, and it was very difficult as all the schools were closing down and there were hardly any archival documents. I was only able to find short videos showing typing competitions on the Internet. Among the most interesting documents I found was a photo of an American championship happening in a place like a velodrome in front of thousands of spectators. I also found some old advertisements: typewriter manufacturers used to organize speed typing competitions. They had made a census of regional championships and I met exchampions, male and female. They all told me about the mental pressure they'd been under and about destabilization techniques between opponents using the eyes, which confirmed for me the notion that this was a true sport. But at that stage I didn't know if the film would be a comedy or a drama.

Then you started to write?

Yes, with the idea of finding my own personal tone. First I wrote some thirty pages, creating characters who revolved around Rose, and with my friend Daniel Presley, who is a music producer and great American '50s comedy movie buff, we created the characters of Bob and Marie. As a result we decided to write the screenplay together. Daniel has very high standards and a Woody Allen kind of humor. We thought we'd write the dialogues in English and that I would adapt them into French so we could have some alchemy between American comedy and the "French touch." I loved the fact that Daniel made very relevant observations on dialogue

and rhythm. We wrote a first draft but were only 60% satisfied with it. We thought that the psychological arc of Rose's character needed more depth. I had read screenplays by Romain Compingt, who is 26 and a great fan of Britney Spears and Marilyn Monroe. Curiously, I thought he had the right kind of sensitivity needed to enrich Rose's character. So I called him and three weeks later he produced his version of the screenplay, with which we were 85% happy. He made the love story more daring. The three of us then worked together, wondering if a collaboration between an admirer of young fallen stars, an American musician and me would work - it wasn't so simple!

At what stage did Alain Attal get involved?

He was the first to read the screenplay. We gave it to him on a Friday and the following Tuesday he told us he wanted to make the film. We met and it became apparent very quickly that his vision of the film was the same as mine. What's great is that he himself acts like a coach. He gets directors in condition so they can give the best of themselves. Alain is my Louis Echarde! He is also driven by a real kind of madness and artistic obsession; he pushed me and encouraged me to question myself, which I love. Furthermore he's a great film buff and we share tastes and visual references. We were able to talk about Nicholas Ray, or Godard, about whom he knows everything, or the color films of Joseph Losey.

Did the project come partially from a desire to evoke the late '50s?

That was a part of it, even if it wasn't my overriding intention to pay homage to that era. In fact the '50s fascinate me aesthetically: music, literature and film. But I also like more recent films that are set in that time, like PLEASANTVILLE or PEGGY SUE GOT MARRIED and I wanted the direction and the editing to be modern.

What do you like so much about the '50s?

It's when teenage consumerism began - with the birth of rock 'n' roll and the evolution of dress codes - and the very beginnings of the entertainment industry and sport sponsorship. In France it's the post-war boom years (from 1945 to 1975), where there was hardly any unemployment and the future looked rosy, even if the state of the world was a lot darker than anyone wanted to admit. Because it was a strange decade where people who had just emerged from the war preferred to avoid having to face tragic events happening in the world. It is only during the following decade that they had to confront them.

It was also a turning point on a sociological and cultural level.

Yes, since 1958-59 immediately preceded the beginning of women's liberation. Two or three years later, skirts will get shorter and women's position in the workplace will start to change. I like this era because it's a crucial time that announces the next sixty years. It's also true regarding fashion: today we still wear the iconic Ray-Bans. It's also an era obsessed with speed: car speed records are established; the first supersonic planes are developed. The obsession with speed that characterizes the '50s touches me all the more so since we are still affected by this quest today.

What were you aiming for visually?

We worked on the artistic direction peripherally. We wanted to recreate the '50s by mixing a

documentary aspect, movies of the era that I love - American movies in particular - and people's fantasy of that time. Everything to do with the lead characters is inspired by cinema and fantasy, by drawing on the works of Billy Wilder or Douglas Sirk; the further you move away from these lead characters the closer you get to documentary. The supporting roles and the extras for example are more anchored in a realistic vision.

What about the color?

We researched many '50s American and French advertisements and watched most of the color films that were made at that time in France. It wasn't easy since most French films were still being shot in black and white and the few that were in color were shot in studios! *THE RED BALLOON* and *ZAZIE DANS LE METRO* were a source of inspiration. But we cheated a bit, since we also watched *nouvelle vague* films like Godard's *A WOMAN IS A WOMAN*.

Did you have other references beside cinema?

We had a reference work by Alex Steinweiss, an illustrator who designed many record sleeves of the period. His work encompassed the entire chromatic scale - for costumes and sets - we used for the film. I also provided the artistic team with the names of certain designers and stylists. I insisted that the film be my own aesthetic vision of the '50s. Most challenging were the exteriors. So we looked at archival color images to stick to the desaturation of the period. We noticed, for example, that cars were always monochromatic since body colors hadn't yet been industrialized, or were reserved for a rich clientele. We opted for a desaturation while keeping red, green and blue as dominant colors. I wanted the eye to be constantly stimulated.

Jacques Demy comes to mind. Was he also a reference for you?

Absolutely! I love stories that seem rosy but aren't when you look close-up. That's probably what links *POPULAIRE* to a fairytale. And if Demy's films sometimes have a happy ending you have to be able to detect the irony between the lines. Demy uses magic and illusion to slip in a message deeper than it appears. I love *DONKEY SKIN* above all, but *THE UMBRELLAS OF CHERBOURG* was also a source of inspiration. That said, *POPULAIRE* is also a swashbuckler. The last scene was inspired by George Sydney's *SCARAMOUCHE*: when Louis arrives in New York we find ourselves in a swashbuckler or gladiator fight.

Why did you give a wink in the direction of VERTIGO?

It wasn't deliberate at first...the dominant red and blue come from *BUTTERFIELD 8* by Daniel Mann, where an adulterous couple goes into a motel. Then we watched *A WOMAN IS A WOMAN*, which also has a red and blue scene. I was inspired by a fantastical vision of Hitchcock who was influenced by other directors. I play with it of course because when Déborah François comes out of the bathroom, I thought I was seeing Kim Novak. We had our composer listen to the *VERTIGO* score and it became impossible for him to move away from it.

How did you develop the characters?

When writing Rose, I thought of all the women in the '50s who wanted to become emancipated, like my mother. She was a farmer's daughter who left her parents to work in the big city. She met my father who was the director of an insurance company, closer to a country doctor in his relationship to people than to what an insurance man is today. He was a catalyst in

his relationship with his clients, and in a way with my mother whom he helped become liberated. When I was born my mother did the same with my father: she became his 'coach' when he retired. I like mutually beneficial relationships between people. In POPULAIRE, Louis helps Rose, he has a desire to be her coach, and little by little the roles are going to reverse. I thought I could find a balance in this link between the characters that become catalysts for one another by turns. Besides, I kept telling my crew: "You are both coaches and sportsmen." I've always loved both.

Please tell us how you chose your actors...

I wanted to have a cast where each one would bring his/her own particularity, like a conductor who chooses musicians who will communicate with one another and try to stay in harmony. A little like Tim Burton who blends famous actors, some lesser-known ones and theatre actors. I knew exactly what I wanted since the characters are very well defined and my actors come from diverse backgrounds. Romain Duris was an obvious choice because I'm very impressed by his gift for comedy and rhythm. He got really involved in his character and asked for parts of the screenplay to be re-written to give more depth. He also conducted his own research: he met a football coach who explained what his work was all about to him. Romain constantly looks deeper and ends up knowing more about his character than you do. I love the fact that like Louis is quite mysterious and doesn't say much about himself. This fuels me and fascinates his partners.

And Rose Pamphyle?

Alain Attal and I thought we needed an unknown actress from the start. But when it came time for casting we decided to keep an open mind. We auditioned about 150 actresses, some of them novices, and Déborah became the obvious choice for everyone. She blends fragility with touching absent-mindedness that can evolve into something glamorous - and that's exactly what we wanted for Rose, this country girl who becomes a star. I was astounded when she actually blushed during our first tests. She *was* Rose Pamphyle. We had to be able to place her photo among photos of the stars of that era without it being shocking, so she could become a new icon. I wanted to tremble when I saw Rose Pamphyle. I like Déborah's independence and resilient character. And we both had in common the fact that POPULAIRE was a chance to work on a big film in which we invested a lot of ourselves.

How did you direct her?

At times I was a sort of Louis Echart for her, particularly during her training as a typist; then Romain took over from me quite naturally. He even went to Liège to watch her train and learn to type with ten fingers. I asked Déborah to watch Billy Wilder comedies with Audrey Hepburn and Shirley MacLaine but I also wanted her to stay close to Marilyn Monroe. I gave her a lot of images of that era so she could understand how women in the '50s held their bodies, how they kissed, sat on and got up from a sofa, etc. Déborah doesn't imitate; she absorbs everything you give her and re-interprets it in her own manner while managing to let go entirely. Only her ponytail is directly inspired by Audrey Hepburn. We even stuck a poster of her on her bedroom wall.

Why did you want Bérénice Béjo for the role of Marie?

I discovered her in THE ARTIST. I found her particularly moving when she grabs Jean Dujardin's coat in his dressing room. I understood you needed to have great sensitivity to succeed in such a scene. I also wanted a beauty, the kind of girl we all admired at school. We had to be able to believe in the relationship between her and Romain, between him and his ideal woman. Even if Romain is totally in love with Rose and Marie is married to Bob, Louis and Marie are together forever. I also knew she was able to play the role of a mother who is perfectly happy, without being duped by the position of women in society of that time. Romain was amazed during their first reading together at how he was able to perceive both her reassuring-motherliness and her 'ahead-of-her-time sexiness.' As her shoulder-length hair betrays, she's a modern woman who is already in the '60s.

Why did you want Louis Echard's friend to be American?

In the '50s, the French used to fantasize about Americans. I also wanted him to symbolize the switch from a consumer society to entertainment industry in France. I was also able, thanks to Bob's character and to Shaun Benson who portrays him, to highlight the musical comedy side of the film since Shaun reminds me so much of Gene Kelly.

How did you choose the pre-existing music tracks?

First of all I didn't stick to the year in which the action takes place. I preferred to give myself a margin of about three years before and after 1958. I love American lounge music and light jazz like Les Baxter or Martin Denny. I'm also passionate about '50s composers who wrote for Sinatra and other crooners. And I wanted to have French songs, but in post-war France the dominant music was Yves Montand, Léo Ferré, Georges Brassens and Edith Piaf. I couldn't find an equivalent of American popular light jazz. Then I discovered little-known artists such as Jack Ary, who led a cha-cha and mambo orchestra. He released about twenty 45s and that's how I unearthed "The Secretary's Cha-Cha."

What about the original score?

I realized that I needed one, as the pre-existing material wasn't enough for me. I called Rob, who works with the band Phoenix and who's great with melodies, and Emmanuel d'Orlando as well. Together they composed an original score that brings great emotional impact to the film. I've always thought that if I were going to do melodrama I'd really go for it. I was inspired by '50s and '60s recording methods, including the positioning of the microphone. We recorded in France and the musicians who are used to playing opera were delighted to play pop while watching images from the film. The end result is close to a musical and I'm delighted since Stanley Donen and Bob Fosse are favorites of mine.

A CONVERSATION WITH ROMAIN DURIS (Louis Echard)

How did you get involved in this project?

Thanks to Régis, of course! He told Alain Attal, the producer, that he would love me to play Louis Achard, the head of a small insurance firm in Normandy. Then everything went very quickly. They contacted my agent David Vatinet and sent me the script before we met.

What did you like about the script?

When I received it I was completely immersed in *THE NIGHT JUST BEFORE THE FOREST*, a play directed by Patrice Chéreau. I had turned down everything because I wasn't keen on any of it. My attention was immediately caught by the originality of what Régis had imagined: a young secretary who becomes a speed typing world champion. I also liked the idea of playing a character from my grandfather's generation, and the strange and mysterious aspect of this character appealed to me. Up until now, Louis has always been number two in his personal life, and his professional life as well since his job isn't the most exciting. And all of a sudden he develops a passion for this secretary whom he wants to turn into a champion. He becomes a coach just like in *ROCKY*. I find his journey extremely moving with the way he keeps himself in the background in order to thrust this young woman to the top. It seemed obvious to me that playing Louis Echard would be very exciting. My meeting with Régis reinforced my wanting to take the part. I was definitely convinced when I listened to him talking about his screenplay with such precision and enthusiasm, and seeing he was ready to listen and to talk.

How did you work on your character?

First of all, Régis showed me newspapers with photos of the era, from which he drew inspiration to create the world of his film. But he also asked me to re-watch movies by Douglas Sirk, Howard Hawks, Billy Wilder and *AN AFFAIR TO REMEMBER* by Leo McCarey. This helped me familiarize myself with vocal tones and the ways of holding yourself and moving your body of that time. But Régis and I were well aware that these references were American, when *POPULAIRE* is imbued with French culture. So I also watched French films from 1958-59, the year in which *POPULAIRE* is set like *LES TRICHEURS* by Marcel Carné, as well as *LES COUSINS* and *LE BEAU SERGE* by Claude Chabrol. These allowed me to observe in detail the codes of the youth of that era: the clothes, the chat-up techniques but also the difference between Parisian and provincial codes. All these elements gave me an ideal basis on which to build Louis.

How would you describe Louis?

He's an ordinary insurance man but people believe in him and entrust their money to him. The opposite of a swindler, someone you think you can trust immediately. A charming man, not crafty. That's probably why he lost Marie, the woman he loved. He's incapable of making a promise that he is not sure to keep at that moment. But Louis has a complex – he always comes second: in sport, in his father's eyes, in Marie's heart. He's not a hero but a deeply frustrated man who transfers all his ambition onto Rose, whom he wants to become a champion.

Why do you think he gets so attached to Rose?

He is charmed by her nerve and her ambition. When Rose wants something she always ends up getting it, sooner or later. He is immediately aware of her potential as a champion. She lights something in him but he stops himself from falling in love with her. And after spending more and more time with her while coaching her, he realizes that she is doing something that he himself could have done. And he projects himself onto her. It is by making this journey with Rose that he will be able to free himself from Marie and allow himself to fall in love again. But in order to do this he has to cure himself of the pain of always coming second. In a way, Rose is a comfort for all his past pains, even if it takes him time to admit it.

Did you need special preparation to portray a coach on screen?

Régis and I met Régis Brouard who was then coach for Quevilly football club. He had managed to take this small national team to the French Cup semi-finals, and he did it again since, by reaching the finals. I was able to observe closely how he talks to his team, which words he chooses in the changing room, how he acts on a day-to-day basis. In fact it's all about authority. You have to know when to be very cold to the people you're coaching, to boost their motivation, and how far you can go without shattering their self-confidence or squashing anyone's ego. It's a very precise technique and quite fascinating to observe.

We often hear that wardrobe helps an actor get into character. Was that the case?

Yes, because Charlotte David's work was incredibly precise. Charlotte is no novice; she has created costumes for OSS 117 among others. So I felt pretty confident and I wasn't disappointed. All the costumes were made to measure, with attention to every single detail. It's a crucial asset before you start a film and I was able to do some tests very early on. This allowed me to be able to get a feeling for the costumes. Two months before the first "Action!" I was already inside the physical aspect of the character.

Did you rehearse before shooting?

We had a simple reading with the actors, but I did quite a few tests with Déborah. Finding Rose took quite a long time. But Déborah came back each time around. She's a great sport. These moments were very useful to me. They allowed me to deepen my understanding of my character and to see how Régis directs his actors.

Would you say that you found this character quickly?

I did get a fairly good idea in my head about his demeanor and his behavior. But his inner side took longer to outline, because throughout the film Louis mustn't appear either friendly or unfriendly; he should reveal himself little by little without any exaggeration. I was guided by one feeling: a sense of propriety. But here again, it's a question of balance because I feared that giving him too much emotional modesty would prevent the audience's emotional response from developing.

How was your collaboration with Déborah François?

Great fun. Déborah uses a lot of technique, in the best sense of the word. So it's easy to make scenes evolve. She doesn't have any blockage. It was extremely pleasant to feel complicity

arising very naturally between us.

What did you like about Régis Roinsard as a director?

Régis gives you a lot of freedom but as soon as he feels that you're going too far, he knows how to intervene at the right moment to redefine you without clipping your wings. I remember for example when we shot the scenes when my character looks at speed typing championships and gets overexcited. Now, I sometimes overdid it and Régis knew how to come to me each time and explain very clearly how to stay in the more 'manly' and focused aspect of the character. And to remind me of how serious and crucial these moments are for Louis. Régis knows how to look at his actors. But I also understood that this film was close to his heart. He is provincial like the characters in POPULAIRE. The theme of recognition, central to this film, is very important to him. And that's not to mention the fact that his grandfather was an active member of the Resistance, like my character. He identified himself with Louis quite a lot. And I can assure you that, as an actor, it's a gift to see the director with tears in his eyes when you play certain scenes. It carries you forward. Régis shows his heart and his soul. He doesn't hesitate to put intimacy into what he is saying. He also has an essential talent which is to know how to surround himself with the right people – Alain Attal, to start with, a great and enthusiastic producer who knows that for such a film to exist and to show the extent of its worth, enough funds have to be invested for certain positions. But also for all heads of department: wardrobe, Guillaume Schiffman the director of photography, the sound, and so forth. And I did notice that everyone, without exception, was touched by the way Régis loved his film, respected everyone and wanted to lead his ship safely to the harbor with them.

In the film there is a memorable scene that reveals quite a lot about your character: the Christmas dinner scene where Rose meets your family unexpectedly. This scene is a great comedy moment. Was it fun to play?

Honestly, it's not very hard to put yourself in the shoes of a son who has problems communicating with his father. Most people have experienced similar situations. As for the rest, the scene was brilliantly written. I dreaded only one thing: that Eddy Mitchell should appear too relaxed. It was crucial that we could feel at once his paternal authority towards Louis. The authority of that time which, seen through today's eyes, seems quite brutal and very remote from what Eddy radiates. However my doubts flew out of the window with the first take. Eddy managed to show a toughness that we don't know him for. And we have to wait until his character relaxes at the end of the scene for everyone to start breathing again, and for Rose to be accepted into the family.

What was most difficult for you in this adventure?

I dreaded the moment when my character decides to let Rose stand on her own two feet before the New York finals. This moment when he's got his way - Rose is champion of France and loves him - he chooses to leave. We had to be very careful that the audience shouldn't lose Louis at that point. It wasn't about explaining everything but finding the right balance so the moment would be both mysterious and moving. It wasn't easy to integrate my character's problems into a fast-paced comedy, led by the 'sporty' footsteps of a champion, to which a love story had already been grafted. But if we didn't slow down enough we risked breaking the

dynamic of the whole thing or preventing any empathy towards Louis. I think we succeeded without weakening the backbone of the film: Rose's journey.

Is the finished product close to what you imagined?

It is more beautiful, because it was impossible to appreciate what Guillaume Schiffman's lighting would render by watching the monitor on set. Régis has succeeded in making a film full of spirit, efficient and extremely sharp. But above all, it's a truly personal film, not in the style of anyone else.

**A CONVERSATION WITH DÉBORAH FRANÇOIS
(Rose Pamphyle)**

What did you like about Rose Pamphyle, your character?

This part is a gift for an actress. I sensed her potential and her sincerity when I first read the screenplay: she touched me. She is sensitive, likes to laugh, gets angry, there's a whole range of emotions that are great fun to play. That's why there were a few of us trying to get the part. I wanted it so badly, I hung in there like crazy. When I met Régis for the first time, I said to him: "Hi, I'm Rose Pamphyle, with a Y." That really made him laugh!

How did you convince him?

Régis and I were very much in synch; Rose touches us both and we're like her in more ways than one. I think that when he met me he understood that for me the challenge was going to be very much like his, my eyes were telling him: "Take me". To convince him I played the first meeting between Rose and Louis; I'll always remember because I rehearsed it so many times! But in the end, my idea of the character was close to the performance I gave in the film.

Had you ever heard of speed typing competitions before?

No, not at all! At first I even thought it was Régis' invention, so I didn't try to find out anything about it. When he told me these competitions had really existed, he inundated me with all sorts of documentation. One short film about a speed typing championship sticks in my mind. It's an unusual and impressive document. He also gave me handbooks for typing and paper-changing techniques, and a video by an American Marines secretary showing how to change paper in three moves. It's staggeringly fast! I also looked at documentaries about the youth of the time, newspaper articles and a great number of illustrations. I saw or saw again several films with Audrey Hepburn - from whom we drew inspiration for Rose's character - such as SABRINA, LOVE IN THE AFTERNOON, FUNNY FACE and MY FAIR LADY.

Did you get any typing training?

I spent two or three hours a day for three months during preparation, and during the shoot as well, but not every day. When I had to type for one scene, I didn't train in the evening because I was afraid of injuring myself. In the beginning I almost got 'typist's elbow', since it's not a natural posture and typewriter keys are hard to push. It's a very particular movement to get used to. Having to type with my little fingers was hard, as I'm not used to typing with all my fingers. And as soon as I made a mistake, I had to go back to square one.

Does the era in which the film is set indicate the beginnings of women's liberation?

Yes, and that's what the two female characters embody: Rose, who comes from the provinces, has a '50s style whereas Marie, who lives in the city and is more affluent, has an early '60s style, with her headbands, her tight cardigans and short trousers. It's difficult to know what comes from the pressures of the time and what comes from women's personal choices.

How would you describe your character?

She's a feminist who doesn't know it. At first I was concerned that, with the film set in the '50s, Rose could appear submissive. But in fact she's a fighter, she's driven, a true female "Rocky", but doesn't know it. She's also clumsy and lacks self confidence, even if she turns out to be a lot stronger than Louis. In fact we discover that he's the one with a deep crack inside him, much more than Rose. As a result the roles get reversed little by little thanks to the love relationship. That is what's beautiful.

She lets success go to her head for a while...

We felt like shaking up her character so the audience would worry a little about her and think, "She's losing it! This isn't the Rose we've seen up until now!" So we shot two or three scenes where she is not herself anymore. In the one with Nicolas Bedos for example, she is not the same person. I almost wanted to make mistakes in my acting so it would be clear that there was a discrepancy with the rest of the film, and that then she'd come back to earth. We wanted to show her weaknesses.

What is it that attracts Rose to Louis?

His aura. She finds him handsome and is seduced by the fact that he is educated, by his social status. I also think she is attracted to him because he's her boss, even if she refuses to admit it. Rose loves Audrey Hepburn and Marilyn Monroe, deep down she's very romantic and becomes besotted with Louis because she wants to experience great love with a handsome man, slightly older than herself, who looks good in a suit. Besides, she finds him touching. When she discovers that he is not as sure of himself as one would think, she can't resist him. That's when she falls in love. I like the idea that they fall in love in stages: it's love at first sight, and then Louis changes his mind, then there is the final dramatic change...

Out of love she doesn't hesitate to defend Louis against his father.

That's Rose for you. In fact in this scene she behaves like she does with Louis – she can't help it, she just can't keep quiet. She's had a few drinks, and it's the first time in her life that she's drunk. But in fact I think his father's behavior truly infuriates her. Through her annoyance she sends a message to her lover but also expresses what she'd like to say to her own father.

How did you find working with Romain Duris?

It was a real pleasure. It's great because with Romain something new and intriguing happens with every take. He's always wondering about things, searching, he has very high standards. We felt a real alchemy between our characters and we kicked the ball back and forth really well. And of course, when one of the two weakened slightly it forced the other to change. There was real competition between us.

Is Régis Roinsard very demanding with his actors?

He is extremely precise, sometimes to the point of obsession. We had the same idea of who the character was so there was no tension on set. He is intransigent when he needs to be, he sticks to his guns. I think it's important for a director to have a strong vision. At the same time he knows how to listen to his actors and crew while getting the most out of them to improve a set, the actor's performance, a line, and so on. At the end I felt that I had great freedom, and this is the film in which I have had most input, including costume and hair, and certain changes in the script. I thought for example that some of her lines were a bit too 'little girl', and not feminist enough. Both writers were extremely understanding and accepted these changes. What was wonderful was to be involved at each stage of the film, always exchanging ideas.

Did you enjoy the '50s costumes and hairstyles?

I loved them. Many costumes were created especially for the film and I was able to discuss them with the wardrobe mistress. I would often consult her to know if such and such outfit was accurate, if such a collar line suited the character. In particular we worked together on the pink dress at the end. At first we hadn't chosen the off-the-shoulder dress that we ended up with, that I loved in HOW TO MARRY A MILLIONAIRE, in the scene when the three actresses arrive at a dinner party wearing evening dresses. I had to be comfortable in it to be able to change the paper easily and use the typewriter. I had a bow added and some pleats to the top, and we gave the dress a slightly more loose-fitting look so it would resemble the cocktail dresses of the time. The color comes from a '50s magazine. The wardrobe mistresses suggested the magnificent fabric. I was crazy about it the minute I saw it and thought it was marvellous that my character would wear a dress that matched the Japy typewriter at the end, even if Régis thought it was a bit too clichéd at first. But the costume ladies and I all ganged up on him, and when he saw the girls going into raptures over the fabric, he gave in.

A CONVERSATION WITH BÉRÉNICE BÉJO (Marie Taylor)

How did you get involved in the project?

When I received the script last September, I didn't let go of it. It seemed so polished, so sincere and precise. But more importantly, I was moved by the story. At first I told my agent that the part of Marie was perhaps too small. But that same evening I thought how stupid that was, that my reasons for acting are the screenplay, not the size of the role. So I called my agent back to explain that I'd like to be part of this project, even in a supporting role. When I met Régis I was very enthusiastic and wanted him to understand that I was ready to play the part fully, with hair rollers, apron, and rolling pin. I think that might have been what he liked about me. I didn't try to change the character or smarten her up; I wanted to play her the way she had been written. Then I did some tests - even though I was very pregnant at the time - to convince him. But I had invited him to the press screening of THE ARTIST so he could understand how I acted.

What was your feeling when you read the screenplay?

I was struck by the fact that it was as tight as could be, each scene had been thought through and nothing left to chance. There was a great expectation in the profession. Everyone had heard about this project! It's very rare to read such a polished screenplay with nothing to add or change.

Marie, your character, is a real emotional catalyst.

That's what I loved about her. She has only a few scenes but one crucial one, where Romain Duris' character realizes he can't miss another opportunity for happiness and living something intense. It's a strong scene that Régis had, by the way, re-written. When you play a supporting role but you have at least one scene where you have to defend your point of view, it somehow justifies making the film. Marie pushes another character in order for him to find fulfilment. She truly evolves and follows a real journey. That's what makes her particularly interesting.

Was the work on costumes helpful to build the character?

Charlotte David, the wardrobe mistress with whom I had already worked on OSS 117, imagined Rose Pamphyle wearing pretty, flowery dresses whereas she saw my character very differently. Since Marie is married to an American and lives in a modern house, she suggested I wore trousers and ballet shoes, which was very helpful in creating my character. For me, Marie already belongs to the '60s. Rose is a young provincial woman and Mary a modern urban woman. It is very important that we can differentiate between them quickly, all the more so since I had only a few scenes and we had to be able to define Marie quickly. The hairstylist opted for a wig since hair at the time was permed and stiff with hairspray so it didn't move at all. I had already played characters from the '50s and '60s so I knew how to hold my body.

Did Régis Roinsard ask you to do any research into the '50s to help you develop your character?

He sent me photos. For example, in the scene where Déborah François plays the piano, he wanted me to cross my legs the same way he had seen on a photo in a magazine. He wanted me to wear the same shoes and the same trousers that were in the photo. It's his obsessive side! Every director focuses his anxiety on one thing and Régis needed the atmosphere on set be identical to the '50s. It reassured him.

How does he direct his actors?

I arrived on set late but I knew the crew quite well and had heard a few bits and pieces from the DP, who also worked on THE ARTIST. I quickly gathered that Régis is meticulous and very precise in his direction of actors, while being a good listener. And since I liked to be directed, we got along fine. We had done some readings early on so we knew where we were going. What I love about Régis is that he intervenes in the actors' performance, not only on framing or shots. To sum it up, I had a lot of fun.

A CONVERSATION WITH ALAIN ATTAL (Producer)

How did you get involved in the project?

Thanks to an appointment at Cannes Film Festival, two years ago, with the agent, Lionel Amant. We were finishing lunch and getting up to leave when he mentioned another project, adding immediately: "But you don't do first films any more?" That stung me into action and I replied: "I'm not against it if it's a good subject." And the proof is that I was at the time prepping Romain Lévy's debut feature. He briefed me on the story in a few words and I sat down, fascinated. I thought the theme was astounding. I didn't know speed typing competitions had ever taken place and I got really excited about what a cinematographic object a typewriter is. The theme of speed typing also appealed to me since my mother worked as a typist and I remember that the number of words per minute she could achieve was written on her CV, a selection criteria at the time. I told Lionel I wanted to be the first to read the script.

And then?

Lionel told Régis that I was enthusiastic, but at first Régis thought it was just talk, as is often the case in Cannes. I called Lionel again to tell him I was very serious and a couple of weeks later I received a nearly completed version of the screenplay. Which is very rare. Usually there is a whole phase of developing the work and re-writing it before you receive the first script. But Régis' screenplay was astounding and very moving. There was one more thing to do: to meet the director since we had never met. And I loved him immediately: he was completely possessed by his subject, he knew the era by heart - he literally lives in 1958. The blend of romance and sport competition was tremendous. I immediately saw a kind of female ROCKY.

Even if the screenplay was already successfully completed, did you work on it again with Régis?

I tried to understand where he wanted to go. In fact I always try to adopt what the director wants to do: I insist on knowing what he has in mind as clearly as possible, to the point of getting to know his artistic intentions almost more than he does. Which leads to lengthy discussions on the narrative, the rhythm, references, etc. Régis knows '50s and '60s cinema inside out, which suits me since I'm a big fan of auteurs like Billy Wilder, Nicholas Ray, Douglas Sirk and the Hitchcock of that era. We had to define the film's key scenes that had to be re-written in order for them to follow his approach as a director.

Which changes did you suggest?

We put a bit more flesh on the couple. Since the first draft there were four competitions - regional, coaching for the following year, the National that Rose wins, and the world - but the romantic mood had to be enhanced. So we spiced up the reasons Louis doesn't want to commit, and we dug into his past and his relationship with his best friend's wife. We decided Rose and he would make love, which wasn't the case at the beginning. This magnificent love scene has strengthened the film. Afterwards when Louis leaves Rose, the emotional tension isn't the same. It has decreased. He is now so much more than her coach.

Was it a great financial challenge to produce such an expensive first film?

It's one of the biggest budgets - some 15 million Euros - for a French first film of the last decade or so, and one of the most expensive films I have produced. But it has to be said that since it's a full-length feature, you can see the funds right there on screen. On some big-budget movies that aren't first films, much of the budget is absorbed by the cast, the writers, the director, leaving less room to manoeuvre for the sets, and costumes. Such a budget for a first film is heavy to manage because almost all the funds are available to making the film itself.

How did you convince your financial partners to follow you?

It was a challenge. I instinctively thought the script was going to lead to an astounding movie, but putting a first film together for 15 million Euros is almost impossible. The first step for Régis and me was to convince a name actor to make the project credible. As luck would have it Romain loved the script and committed immediately to the project. Then it was imperative, to reassure our partners, to surround ourselves with big names for the crew. Régis and I agreed to attempt to convince Guillaume Schiffman who was finishing work on *THE ARTIST*. After we had assembled a solid technical and artistic team I met the investors and then I realized I had been right to believe in this unusual project, because all the potential partners to whom I presented the screenplay supported it. They then went into fierce competition to be a part of it. The Canal+ committee was unanimous and Wild Bunch was enthusiastic. Then I met several distributors, who all said yes. If I chose Mars it is of course because of their great competence and the fact that they liked the project but also because I had just finished *POLISSE* and favored a distributor who had supported me on a more difficult project. Finally the television channels were won over by the project. I finalised an agreement with France 2 and France 3 who committed to the project together, which is quite unusual.

What were the biggest production difficulties?

As soon as you're shooting a period film and trying to be as realistic as possible, you have to be able to make the right compromises. You have to find the correct balance between striving for artistic excellence, what serves the story and what pleases the director who wants to cover himself. These questions come up every other second. As a producer I have to help the director to make choices as to how to spend the money. For example, you can choose to have 300 extras for the world championship or to have less and favour a wide-angle shot in New York. An extra in a period film costs about 1,000 Euros per day as opposed to 130 Euros for a contemporary film (make-up, costume, hair plus the necessary staff soon raise the expense). Similarly you can decide to have 40 American cars in front of the theatre in New York or a few hundred but if you chose the second option you'll have to do without the crane, the night shoot, and so forth.

POPULAIRE exudes happiness, like some of the great American classics.

I think it's because the audience identifies itself easily with the emotional twists and turns into which the characters are thrown. Louis is the driving force at first, while Rose is more of a follower, and then the relationship reverses. To me *POPULAIRE* can be related to certain Billy Wilder or Douglas Sirk films, where heroism can be found in ordinary people, as portrayed by the likes of Audrey Hepburn, Cary Grant, James Stewart, and Kim Novak. Jack Lemmon's character in *THE APARTMENT* is typical. You wonder how this guy can be a hero when he really

is a coward, but the writing is so good that you identify with him. There was something of that in Régis' script. To me it's a great saga about people who meet, who love one another, and who move away from each other. If the film works, when you come out of the cinema you'll feel as if you've been a part of these characters' intimate life.

There's a sociological dimension (women's liberation) to the romantic comedy.

This is one of the factors I liked. The issue is quite clear in the film: in 1958 feminism consisted of wanting to become a secretary and trying to find a place in the world of men, which is to say in the workplace. Rose embraces perfectly the era in which she lives: she portrays a woman who refuses what has been dictated to her by her upbringing and her father. In this she is a true feminist: she takes her destiny in her own hands and, thanks to her perseverance, she finds a job, a coach, and ends up winning all the competitions. And when Louis leaves her, she doesn't fall apart - she's a fighter. I even think she is more liberated than Marie (Bérénice Béjo) who is a lot more modern in style but has chosen to remain a housewife.

When you produce a first film, do you have to invest more of yourself?

I think you invest yourself in the same way. The slight difference is that your help is requested more. There is the same trusting atmosphere that you have with experienced directors but the director who is making his first film will probably have more questions - all the more so when the film's budget is high. Régis was so grateful that we gave him the chance to realise his dream that he was anxious during preparation and often sought my advice. But as early as the first days of shooting I realized that he knew exactly what he wanted and what he was doing, that he had his story in his hands from beginning to end and was without any doubt going to achieve a great film.

A CONVERSATION WITH GUILLAUME SCHIFFMAN (DP)

How did you get involved in POPULAIRE?

Alain Attal and I have wanted to make a film together for a long time. Unfortunately we had never found the right project, or our schedules clashed. Then one day he calls me and wants me to read a script. I read it, and find the project unusual and extremely interesting. It's POPULAIRE! Then I only wanted one thing: to meet Régis and assure myself that he didn't want me only for my label as a period film specialist. In fact that wasn't the case, since he had done his research and liked my work as director of photography on contemporary films. I liked the fact that Régis told me he wanted my involvement on set, the intuitive way I work with directors, and for me to throw myself into the adventure of a film with a crew at the service of a director's vision. Furthermore I love working with actors I've never worked with. Romain Duris has been surprising and delighting me for a long time and I was knocked out by Déborah François' performance in MES CHÈRES ÉTUDES by Emmanuelle Bercot. I think in fact that, after the screenplay and the director's commitment, my inspiration often comes from the actors and the pleasure I get creating images and a visual style with them.

What were Régis' big visual choices?

Régis and I both had the same film references from the beginning, somewhere in between *SOME CAME RUNNING* by Vincente Minnelli and *GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES* by Howard Hawks: a delightful artistic range. We also talked about Douglas Sirk and his sublime, baroque and over-the-top lighting, Montgomery Clift's elegance, and Shirley MaClaine's absolute charm. More than big visual choices, we talked mostly about our emotions and pleasure as film buffs. In any case we wanted to allow ourselves great range of light. *POPULAIRE* is a film that both refers strongly to the sixties and continuously takes great liberties.

How did you work your chromatic palette?

I didn't want to fall into a pale imitation of Technicolor, something quaint and cheap that never works. The idea was to give the feeling you were immersed in that era, while being irreverent towards our idea of Technicolor. Technicolor has brighter reds and greens. So even though the colors are slightly de-saturated it's effective in rendering the right feel of the time.

What about the framing?

Framing is all in the directing. When you have the same vision for the film, you don't work on the framing. It happens spontaneously. We mostly talked about what we'd like, about feelings, intentions, and challenges. Since we had allowed ourselves some freedom regarding the era, we made all the decisions in a most harmonious way.

Do you find more is asked of you when working on a first film?

I feel I invest just as much of myself with experienced directors. Even if sometimes the demands are greater, my involvement is identical. Régis made demands on me as much as I made demands on him. If there is a quality specific to this film, it is the pleasure, the joy, the general will to do well and the investment of each member of the crew.

CREW

Directed by
Régis Roinsard

Screenplay by
Régis Roinsard
Daniel Presley and Romain Compingt

Producer
Alain Attal

Line Producer
Xavier Amblard

Casting
Nicolas Ronchi

D.P.
Guillaume Schiffman

Sound
Piere Mertens

Production Design
Sylvie Olivé

Costume Design
Charlotte David

1st Assistant Director
Nicolas Cambois

Hair
Jane Milon

Make-up
Thi-Thanh-Tu Nguyen

Edit
Laure Gardette
Sophie Reine

Music
Rob and Emanuel D'Orlando

CAST

Romain Duris - *Louis Echard*
Déborah François - *Rose Pamphyle*
Bérénice Béjo - *Marie Taylor*
Shaun Benson - *Bob Taylor*
Mélanie Bernier - *Annie Leprince Ringuet*
Nicolas Bedos - *Gilbert Japy*
FÉODOR ATKINE - *André Japy*
Miou-Miou - *Madeleine Echard*
Eddy Mitchell - *Georges Echard*
Frédéric Pierrot - *Jean Pamphyle*
Marius Coluci - *Lucien Echard*
Emeline Bayart - *Jacqueline Echard*
Yannik Landrein - *Léonard Echard*
Nastassja Girard - *Evelyne Echard*
Caroline Tillette - *Vamp*
Jeanne Cohendy - *Françoise*
Dominique Reymond - *Mrs Shorofsky*
Serpentine Teyssier - *Boarding School Proprietress*