

# DIVA

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## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director  
**Jean-Jacques Beineix**

Screenplay  
**Jean-Jacques Beineix**  
**Jean Van Hamme**

**Based on the novel by Delacorta**

Producer  
**Irène Silberman**

Cinematography  
**Philippe Rousselot**

Production Design  
**Hilton McConnico**

Sound  
**Jean-Pierre Ruh**

Editors  
**Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte**  
**Monique Prim**

Original Music  
**Vladimir Cosma**

Non Original Music  
**Alfredo Catalani (from the Opera *La Wally*)**

English translation/subtitles (2007 Rialto re-release)  
**Lenny Borger**

Original French release: March 1981

U.S. release: April 1982

France 1981 COLOR Aspect ratio 1.66:1 In French with English subtitles

Running time: 117 min.

**A FILMS GALAXIE / GREENWICH FILM PRODUCTION COPRODUCTION**  
**A RIALTO PICTURES RELEASE**

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## CAST

Cynthia Hawkins  
**Wilhelmenia Wiggins Fernandez**

Jules  
**Frédéric Andrei**

Gorodish  
**Richard Bohringer**

Alba  
**Thuy An Luu**

Saporta  
**Jacques Fabbri**

Nadia  
**Chantal Deruaz**

Paula  
**Anny Romand**

Weinstadt  
**Roland Bertin**

The Caribbean  
**Gérard Darmon**

The Priest  
**Dominique Pinon**

Krantz  
**Jean-Jacques Moreau**

Zapoteck  
**Patrick Floersheim**

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## AWARDS

César, Best First Film  
César, Best Cinematography  
César, Best Music  
César, Best Sound

National Society of Film Critics  
Best Cinematography

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## WHAT THE CRITICS SAID ABOUT *DIVA* (excerpts from 1982 reviews)

“Every shot seems designed to delight the audience. If *Diva* is about anything, it is about the joy of making movies.” - Pauline Kael, *The New Yorker*

“A visual extravaganza. One of the most persistently entertaining, absorbing and scary thrillers I’ve seen in a long time.... *Diva's* chase scene deserves ranking with the all-time classics, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The French Connection*, and *Bullitt*.” - Roger Ebert

“You have only to watch 10 minutes of *Diva* and you know you are in the hands of a man born to make movies. Sensual, funny, outlandish, this is a movie devoted strictly to the pleasure principle.” - David Ansen, *Newsweek*

“A piece of divine madness, full of comedy romance, opera and murder. *Diva* is a thriller with a new way of looking at the world – through a glass, brightly.” - Michael Sragow, *Rolling Stone*

“*Diva* is not only the most purely pleasurable movie to open here this year, but surely one of the finest films to arrive from France in a decade.” - J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*

“A razzle–dazzle sendup of thrillers... high-spirited and outrageous.” - Kevin Thomas, *Los Angeles Times*

“Funny, exciting, moving, mysterious and beautiful to look at... I love *Diva*.” - David Overbey, *Film Comment*

“An extraordinary thriller. Complex, stylish and fast-moving, *Diva* is a superior piece of entertainment”. - *Variety*

“The most impressive debut from a French director since Godard’s *Breathless*.” - Jay Scott, *The Globe and Mail*

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## SYNOPSIS

**NOTE: This synopsis contains spoilers.**

For Parisian bohemian postman Jules, there is nothing more wonderful in the world than opera, and no greater opera singer than African-American diva Cynthia Hawkins. Because she refuses to make records, valuing only the unique moment of the concert, Jules is left no choice but to resort to what any adoring fan would do: he secretly records a tape during a performance. He obtains the diva's autograph in her dressing room; he steals her white dress; and then returns to his loft (an old garage) to listen to the previously unrecorded diva on his hi-fi system. He is unaware that two Taiwanese saw him record the Diva, just as he is unaware that Nadia, a prostitute, has, before being killed by two thugs, The Caribbean and The Priest, dropped a tape which would reveal the identity of the boss of a drug and prostitution racket into the bag on his moped.

Jules makes friends with a young Vietnamese kleptomaniac girl named Alba who borrows the tape of the diva so that her boyfriend Gorodish can listen to it. Saporta, the police chief, who is also head of the racket, instructs the thugs to get Nadia's tape before his detectives do. Jules, in the meantime, begins a flirtation with his idol Cynthia. The Taiwanese try to blackmail the diva into signing a record contract by revealing the existence of Jules's tape while Jules is with her. Jules remorsefully leaves to collect the tape, is pursued first by the detectives, then, having listened to what he thought was the tape of the diva, but was in fact Nadia's tape, by the thugs. He is saved at the last minute by Gorodish who takes him to a lighthouse to recover.

Gorodish listens to Nadia's tape and forces Saporta to pay him for it at a meeting in an empty warehouse. The Taiwanese take the cassette, but Saporta blows up their car. Jules is caught by the thugs, who take him to his loft where one of the two detectives, Paula, is still on a stake-out. Paula kills The Priest and wounds The Caribbean. The Caribbean is finished off by Saporta. Gordodish arrives just in time to save Jules and Paula; Saporta is killed when he falls down the elevator shaft.

Jules returns the diva's tape to her in the empty Opéra. The two of them hold hands intimately as Cynthia Hawkins listens to her recorded voice for the first time.

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## **BEINEIX ON *DIVA*** **(an interview with Jean-Jacques Beineix)**

Irène Silberman called me and asked “Did you read *Diva*?” I said no but that I would. I read it the same day and it was incredible because I was immediately taken by the characters. By the singer, by the postman – who wasn’t a postman in the novel but a delivery man for a record company – I was seduced by this character, his solitude, his passion, the fact that he is a collector. And I was seduced by this love story paired with the police intrigue and the mystery. It was a genre movie, and at the same time it touched all genres. At the time we used to make autobiographical films. This film was the opposite, it was a commissioned film but one where I could include a lot of myself without anyone realizing it, because, in fact, the postman Jules is a little bit me.

*Diva* tells the story of our time, the story of the artist facing the mechanism of production. It’s a movie that deals with the situation of the artist faced with the means of recording. The subject matter is very modern; *Diva* is very, very, modern. When you see the movie again today you realize it hasn’t aged.

I put in this picture everything there was. The scenery around us today is artificial, with drawings on the walls, advertisements, the décor. We live in a world of décors, we live in a fake world, and this fake world is a reality, our daily life. And *Diva* plays with all this, including the classic characters of the detective novel who have been diverted. It’s a diversion of genres.

It’s the mission of the artist to invent, to provoke, to be subversive and different. Everywhere I found conventions and archetypes in filmmaking. With 80 years of cinema behind us, I could not understand why so many movies kept saying things in the same way. I wanted to regain the pleasure of surprise that I had as a kid. While filming *Diva* I did everything and anything but, at the same time, with a kind of conviction, with sincerity and without distancing. I was asking incredible things from Philippe Rousselot who used to assume the lotus position to calm down, dripping with sweat. Serge Silberman used to threaten to stop filming every other day. Uly Pickard, the head of production would say “You need a crane, but will you know how to use it?” I was close to saying, “Shut up, I invented the crane!”

And then there was the wonderful meeting with Wilhelmenia, with whom I fell immediately in love and I became the postman. And there was Dominique Pinon whom I had wanted for the first movie I was supposed to do and never did - I had written a script. There it was -- a miracle!

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When the movie came out, I really had the impression I had made my first and last movie because the reviews were horrendous. I was butchered. They said I had grandiose taste, that the movie cost a fortune, that there was no script. Some journalists liked it, but they didn't know what to write about it. *Diva* is unique. It can't be done again. The career of this film is unique. When I say that I felt I made two movies for the price of one, my first and my last one, it's because the film at first was a catastrophe. Few remember this because in the end it was seen by one million [people] in Paris, but the first year only one hundred thousand people saw it. It was at a stand-still after one year. Can you imagine a film today in theaters for one year with one hundred thousand viewers and after one year, boom, suddenly one million viewers in Paris alone?

I insist that it is a very modern film, but I shouldn't be saying that, I will sound pretentious. Yet luck, the novel and the characters make it a modern film, with modern actors. But it was another era. The cinema has changed since then. That's the way it is. There will be other genres, but I don't know if there will be other Divas.

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## BEINEIX ON “HIS” DIVA

The first time I saw her, she was smashing plates with incomparable authority on the immense stage of the Opéra de Paris. A black and capricious Musetta, dressed in red velvet, beautiful and violent, she already fascinated me, and then there was her voice, perfectly round and velvety, her singing perfectly sustained by the physical involvement in the part. I had found my Diva.

Many months of research, trips, and meetings: the black divas of London, Munich, and New York; a list that we thought was complete and to which there was always one more name to add. After the performance, I did not go to see her. I needed to wait for the excitement to pass, for only then I would know if the dream was reality.

It became a reality the next day, when she appeared in my non-descript office, in a red dress and an immense purple shawl. She was very simple and I suddenly found myself in the difficult situation of having to ask her to play a diva. We talked; she knew nothing about cinema, I knew nothing about opera, everything was possible, so why not shoot an *opera-policier*?

As I watched Wilhelmenia, I knew that she was Cynthia Hawkins, the diva, and that no one else would play that part.

Cinema, shooting: the time when the exceptional meets the ordinary. She worked extremely professionally, with dignity, always on time and diligent. Through her I understood that opera is a form of asceticism that many movie actors should turn to for inspiration.

It is impossible to reduce a person to a sum of qualities and faults. I treasure the memory of a passionate woman, possessed by music, terrorized before a concert, jubilant after it, always ready to burst into flames over one note. She was Diva, and Diva was how I wanted her. I will never forget when we went to London, before the film, to record the music...her excitement, and mine, as she advanced alone, in front of the 24 musicians of the London Orchestra, and then, finally liberated from the stage fright that oppressed her, her voice started to rise...

For that *Wally*, I will be forever grateful.

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## NOTES ON THE *CINÉMA DU LOOK*

*Diva* single-handedly launched the *Cinéma du look*, an explosion of visually stunning, punk-inspired, super-cool French movies in the early 80s.

“The *Cinéma du look* was a French film movement of the 1980s. It referred to films that had a slick visual style and a focus on young, alienated characters that were said to represent the marginalized youth of Francois Mitterrand's France. The three main directors of the *Cinéma du look* were Jean-Jacques Beineix, Luc Besson and Leos Carax. Themes that run through many of their films include doomed love affairs, young people with peer groups rather than families, a cynical view of the police and the use of the Paris Métro to symbolize an alternative, underground society. The mixture of 'high' culture, such as the opera music of *Diva* and *Les Amants du Pont-Neuf* and pop culture, for example the references to Batman in *Subway*, was another key feature. Unlike most film movements, the *Cinéma du look* had no clear political ideology. - *Wikipedia*

Ginette Vincendeau, in her *Companion to French Cinema* (Cassell, 1996), defines the films made by Beineix, Besson and Carax as “youth oriented films with high production values... The “look” of the *Cinéma du look* refers to the films’ high investment in non-naturalistic, self-conscious aesthetics, notably intense colors and lighting effects. Their spectacular (studio-based) and technically brilliant *mise-en-scène* is usually put to the service of romantic plots.”

“Most of Beineix’s feature films to date were released in a single decade, the 1980s, and he is generally seen as the best example of what came to be known as the *Cinéma du look*. This was one of the two new types of film to emerge in the 80s (the other being the heritage film), to join the other popular French genres of the comedy and the *policier*. The *Cinéma du look* was placed by many, including Beineix himself, in a position of confrontation with the cinema of the *Nouvelle Vague*. Just as Truffaut had famously attacked the filmmakers of the 1950’s, the *tradition de qualité*, so did Beineix thirty years later by attacking the *Nouvelle Vague* and the establishment of critics who supported the modernist cinema it represented, for being out of touch with contemporary, and especially young, audiences.” - Phil Powrie, *Jean-Jacques Beineix* (Manchester University Press, 2001)

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## THE OPERA IN *DIVA*

“When the film was finished, I asked several prominent people in the opera world to see the film, not to give me a judgment of it as a film, but to see if the music could stand up to the scrutiny of experts. They said yes, but I was still concerned if it would stand up to American opera lovers.” – Beineix

*La Wally* is a four-act opera composed by Alfredo Catalani to a libretto by Luigi Illica and first performed at La Scala, Milan on January 20, 1892. The libretto is based on a theatre piece by Wilhelmine von Hillern (1836-1916), *Die Geyer-Wally, Eine Geschichte aus den Tyroler Alpen* (literally: "The Vulture-Wally"). The story is set in a village in Tyrol. The father of the heroine, Schrodinger, wants to arrange a marriage for her that she does not want. Wally instead leaves her home with the minstrel Hagenbach.

The opera is best known for its aria *Ebben? Ne andrò lontana*, (Act I), sung when Wally decides to leave her home forever. It is a must in the repertoire and recitals of the greatest sopranos, yet before *Diva* it was mostly unknown to larger audiences. Cynthia Hawkins sings this aria in the recital that opens *Diva*, and the aria is featured prominently throughout the film. Following are the lyrics:

*Ebben? Ne andrò lontana,  
come va l'eco della pia campana...  
là, fra la neve bianca,  
là, fra le nubi d'or...  
là dove è la speranza,  
la speranza, il rimpianto, il rimpianto,  
e il dolor!  
O della madre mia casa gioconda  
la Wally ne andrò da te,  
da te, lontana assai,  
e forse a te, e forse a te,  
non farà mai più ritorno, ne più la rivedrai.  
Mai più, mai più.  
Ne andrò sola e lontana,  
come l'eco della pia campana...  
là, fra la neve bianca.  
Ne andrò, ne andrò,  
sola e lontana...  
E fra le nubi d'or!*

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## ROGER EBERT ON *DIVA*

The opening shots inform us with authority that *Diva* is the work of a director with an enormous gift for creating visual images. We meet a young Parisian mailman. His job is to deliver special-delivery letters on his motor scooter. His passion is opera, and, as *Diva* opens, he is secretly tape-recording a live performance by an American soprano. The camera sees this action in two ways. First, with camera movements that seem as lyrical as the operatic performance. Second, with almost surreptitious observations of the electronic eavesdropper at work. His face shows the intensity of a fanatic: He does not simply admire this woman, he adores her. There is a tear in his eye. The operatic performance takes on a greatness, in this scene, that is absolutely necessary if we're to share his passion. We do. And, doing so, we start to like this kid.

He is played by Frédéric Andrei, an actor I do not remember having seen before. But he could be Antoine Doinel, the subject of *The 400 Blows* and several other autobiographical films by Truffaut. He has the same loony idealism, coexisting with a certain hard-headed realism about Paris. He lives and works there, he knows the streets, and yet he never quite believes he could get into trouble. *Diva* is the story of the trouble he gets into. It is one of the best thrillers of recent years but, more than that, it is a brilliant film, a visual extravaganza that announces the considerable gifts of its young director, Jean-Jacques Beineix. He has made a film that is about many things, but I think the real subject of *Diva* is the director's joy in making it. The movie is filled with so many small character touches, so many perfectly observed intimacies, so many visual inventions, from the sly to the grand, that the thriller plot is just a bonus. In a way, it doesn't really matter what this movie is about; Pauline Kael has compared Beineix to Orson Welles and, as Welles so often did, he has made a movie that is a feast to look at, regardless of its subject.

But to give the plot its due: *Diva* really gets under way when the young postman slips his tape into the saddlebag of his motor scooter. Two tape pirates from Hong Kong know that the tape is in his possession, and, since the American soprano has refused to ever allow any of her performances to be recorded, they want to steal the tape and use it to make a bootleg record. Meanwhile, in a totally unrelated development, a young prostitute tape-records accusations that the Paris chief of police is involved in an international white-slavery ring. The two cassette tapes get exchanged, and *Diva* is off to the races.

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One of the movie's delights is the cast of characters it introduces. Andréi, who plays the hero, is a serious, plucky kid who's made his own accommodation with Paris. The diva herself, played by Wilhelmenia Wiggins Fernandez, comes into the postman's life after a most unexpected event (which I deliberately will not reveal, because the way in which it happens, and what happens, are enormously surprising). We meet others: A young Vietnamese girl who seems so blasé in the face of Paris that we wonder if anything truly excites her; a wealthy man-about-town who specializes in manipulating people for his own amusement; and a grab bag of criminals.

Most thrillers have a chase scene, and mostly they're predictable and boring. *Diva's* chase scene deserves ranking with the all-time classics, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The French Connection*, and *Bullitt*. The kid rides his motorcycle down into the Paris Metro system, and the chase leads on and off trains and up and down escalators. It's pure exhilaration, and Beineix almost seems to be doing it just to show he knows how. A lot of the movie strikes that note: Here is a director taking audacious chances, doing wild and unpredictable things with his camera and actors, just to celebrate moviemaking.

There is a story behind his ecstasy. Jean-Jacques Beineix has been an assistant director for ten years. He has worked for directors ranging from Claude Berri to Jerry Lewis. But the job of an assistant director is not always romantic and challenging. Many days, he's a glorified traffic cop, shouting through a bullhorn for quiet on the set, and knocking on dressing room doors to tell the actors they're wanted. Day after day, year after year, the assistant director helps set up situations before the director takes control of them. The director gives the instructions, the assistant passes them on. Perhaps some assistants are always thinking of how they would do the shot. Here's one who finally got his chance.

**January 1, 1982**

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## PAULINE KAEEL ON *DIVA*

The French romantic thriller “Diva” dashes along with a pell-mell gracefulness, and it doesn’t take long to see that the images and visual gags and homages all fit together and reverberate back and forth. It’s a glittering toy of a movie, like “Touch of Evil”, “The Stunt Man” or “Zazie Dans le Métro”. This one is by a new director, Jean-Jacques Beineix (pronounced simply Ben-ex, with the stress on the second syllable), who understands the pleasures to be had from a picture that doesn’t take itself very seriously. Every shot seems designed to delight the audience. Now thirty-five, Beineix has been working as an assistant director to other directors for ten years; he begins his own directing career as a Euro-disco entertainer with a fabulous camera technique. The movie doesn’t have the purity of conception of those other toys. It isn’t quite in their class, and though you may come out of it with some of the same exhilaration, it isn’t really memorable. But the images are so smooth yet so tricky and hip that Beineix might be Carol Reed reborn with a Mohawk haircut.

The diva of the title is an awesomely beautiful black American soprano called Cynthia Hawkins (and played by the American Wilhelmenia Fernandez), who inspires a fanatic following, like that of Maria Callas. But the glorious Cynthia has a major eccentricity: she refuses to make recordings, because she wants the public to have the full experience of a singer’s presence. Jules, the eighteen-year-old hero (Frédéric Andrei), a skinny young postal messenger in Paris, with an official cap that’s too big for his face, is, perhaps, Cynthia’s most dedicated fan. He rides his motorbike all way to Munich and other cities she performs in, and when she gives a concert in Paris he sneaks his Nagra tape machine in and makes a recording – he wants to be able to listen to her at home. Her voice is thrilling in the hushed, expectant atmosphere; her off-the-shoulder, satin gown reveals a creamy brown arm, and her lips push out toward us as she articulates the words. Jules’ face is full of adoration; a tear collects in one eye and falls, while his hands skillfully regulate the dials. It’s at this point that the picture opens, and from there on we follow the chaos that envelops Jules because of this tape and a second tape that he knows nothing about. A barefoot prostitute, running away from two assassins and trying to reach a policewoman to turn over a cassette revealing names and details of a narcotics-and-vice ring, sees the killers coming at her, and, just before being murdered, she drops the tape in the saddlebag of Jules’ bike. The wide-eyed music lover Jules is the subject of two intertwined chases. The police and the killers are after him for the prostitute’s exposé, and a pair of Chinese record pirates from Taiwan are trying to get his concert tape, so that they can use it to blackmail Cynthia Hawkins into signing with them – they threaten that if she doesn’t they’ll release the illicit recording.

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For a while, Jules innocently goes on about his life. In a music store, he watches a young Vietnamese girl, Alba (played by the fourteen-year-old Thuy An Luu), as she calmly snitches a record and brazens it out with the suspicious clerk. The unfazable Alba is the post-Godardian tootsie – in her short-short skirts and transparent plastic coat, she’s a lollipop wrapped in cellophane. Alba appears to have no inner life at all, to be totally – and enchantingly – a creature of surface attitudes, all pose. In the street, outside the store, she tells Jules that the record is a present for a guy who’s in his cool phase, and takes him to meet the guy – Gorodish (Richard Bohringer), the most dream-born of the characters (and ultimately, perhaps, the least successful element). When you see this movie, which opened in Paris in March, 1981, and is still running (it has just won some of the top French prizes - Best First Film, and Best Photography, Sound and Music), you get a clear sense of what went wrong for Coppola in his “One from the Heart”. Much of what Coppola seemed to be aiming for – the dreamy-disco fun in the detritus of tech commercialism (bashed-in old cars, broken signs, painted skies on billboards) – Beineix had already got onto the screen. And Beineix made it work, because his picture has the baroque characters to go with it – a dozen or so of them – and an amusing enough suspense plot to support it (though the plot is so smart it outsmarts itself in places, and the introduction of a fairy godfather does seem a bit of a cheat). Jules lives in a warehouse-like garage and auto graveyard that’s reached by a huge car-lift elevator, and Gorodish (he could be thirty-five or forty) lives in a vast bluish space so large Alba skates around in it. Kinetic sculptures slosh water back and forth, and Gorodish works on the waves of a giant jigsaw puzzle of the sea, while piling up Gitanes cigarette boxes, with their wavy blue and white lines. When all hell breaks loose around Jules, Gorodish in his white suit helps him hide out by packing him into his white Citroen and taking him to a lighthouse-castle that’s magical in the blue dawn light. Gorodish seems to be a punkers’ *deus ex machina*, wise in the ways of criminals. He knows how to deal with the forces in society, and, effortlessly, he has the wherewithal to do it. The hero of a novel by Delacorta – which, adapted by Beineix and Jean Van Hamme, served as the taking-off place for “Diva” – Gorodish is the bemused Mr. Cool. The conception may be all too airily French. Gorodish is a tease of character – a Zen master of gadgetry – and he’s enjoyable. But toward the end, when he takes over, something gets dampened. Gorodish isn’t either believably human or high-wire enough to be a creature of fantasy. He’s in between.

Jules’ garage, with its crippled Rolls-Royce and its posters for events long past, looks much like Frederic Forrest’s dream refuge in “One from the Heart”, but there’s a sizable difference. Forrest’s company was Reality Wrecking, and he wandered through the painted Las Vegas set morosely. Beineix accepts the

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faddish, constantly changing reality; he didn't build this vision – it isn't a set, it's Paris as he sees it, and he shows the crazy, dissociated pleasures in it. He isn't even saying that this is a condemned playground; he doesn't make any moral judgment – he's having too much fun looking at the players. "Diva" is the human side of Alphaville. Even gags, such as Alba in Jules' garage hopscotching on a nude woman painted on the floor, or Gorodish wearing a diver's mask and snorkel as he chops onions, seem to come out of their characters. And conceits, such as Alba sitting on top of Gorodish's refrigerator as if she were Helen Morgan on the piano, or affectations, such as Jules strolling in the Tuileries with Cynthia Hawkins and holding a white umbrella above her head to frame her beauty, seem exactly what these characters would do. Beineix presents people who charm us because they arrange their reality to suit their whims. They're unself-conscious about being self-conscious. Godard showed us people who were turning into cartoons; the people here don't mind being cartoons – they amuse themselves at it. They make their lives scintillate.

When Cynthia listens to Jules' tape of her singing, she realizes she was wrong to be against recording. But in a way she wasn't. If you put on the record of Wilhelmenia Fernandez singing her big number in the movie – the aria from the first act of Catalani's "La Wally" – you may decide that Cynthia Hawkins was right, because without her beauty and the drama of her presence and the charged setting that movie gives her performance, her voice isn't quite as overwhelmingly glorious. A movie can do for a performer most of what a live stage appearance can do, and then some. (What singer in a solo recital could afford a whole orchestra behind her?) Actually, the entire movie demonstrates the richness that you can get only from movies. If it's about anything, it's about the joy of making them. (At the lighthouse, Alba serves Jules coffee out of a coffeepot that could be a miniature version of the lighthouse itself.)

"Diva" is a later stage of what Godard was getting at in "Masculine Feminine" and in his other movies about "the children of Marx and Coca-Cola" – except that now Marx is gone and New Wave music and video games have settled in. What Marxists and other puritans have never wanted to allow for is the fun to be had with the material goodies that capitalism produces (such as entertaining movies). Godard knew it, recognized that alienation wasn't all torment, and then somehow blotted it from his mind. (When he became more political, he *wanted* us all to be tormented.) Alba, the wise-child playmate, may be shell-shocked, but she's having a good time. The young actress Thuy An Luu is completely at ease in front of the camera; if that's the result of fundamental indifference (and it may very well be), it works to her great advantage here. Jules is the Jean-Pierre Léaud of Godard's films with a love of music and a sweeter nature; he wears an invisible aureole, but he's still a fan. Cynthia treats him like a lovely pet, and that

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seems just about right – he’s birdlike. (Wilhelmenia Fernandez’ American-accented French and her amateurishness as an actress are ingratiating. It’s her bad luck, though, to be caught in the only real lapse of judgment in the movie: Cynthia invites Jules to stay with her while she practices, and then proceeds to sing “Ave Maria” – the banality of the choice momentarily strips her of glamour.)

Beineix may not be interested in what’s underneath, but he has a great feeling for surfaces. A chase through the Métro and an escape to a pinball-machine and video-game arcade are so ravishing that they’re funny, intentionally. The whole high-tech incandescence of the film is played for humor. Beineix takes it for granted that we’ll make all sorts of connections between his images and other movies we’ve seen – Cynthia Hawkins at the start is like Arletty’s Garance in “Children of Paradise”; a police informer who works on a boardwalk operating a Wheel of Chance has layer upon layer of movie associations; there’s a little salute to Marilyn Monroe in “The Seven Year Itch” and Welles is in the huge deserted bluish factory where the all-knowing Gorodish arranges a meeting with the villain – it recalls “The Trial”. Welles is everywhere. But Beineix doesn’t force connections on us. Everything is deft, flamboyant yet light – Jules takes Cynthia Hawkins’ pearly satin gown and flings it around his neck, like a First World War aviator’s scarf, as he rides off on a borrowed motorbike. In the factory, Gorodish’s tape-recorded voice directs the villain. Every shot seems to have a shaft of wit. It’s Welles romanticized, gift-wrapped. It’s a mixture of style and chic hanky-panky, but it’s also genuinely sparkling. The camera skids ahead, and you see things you don’t expect. Beineix thinks with his eyes.

**- *The New Yorker*, April 19, 1982**

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## **JEAN-JACQUES BEINEIX (Writer/Director)**

Born in Paris on October 8, 1946, Beineix developed an interest in cinema at a young age. After discovering the medium through repeated viewings of old 16mm films at a local film club, he began making 8mm shorts with his friends when he was 16. During the 70s, he gave up studying medicine to start his career in film. He became an established assistant director, working with Claude Berri, René Clément, Claude Zidi, Jean-Louis Trintignant and even Jerry Lewis (on the ill-fated *The Day the Clown Cried*). But, like many assistants, Beineix's ultimate dream was to direct. He had a chance in 1977 with the short film *Le Chien de Monsieur Michel*. A promising debut, it won the first prize at the Trouville Film Festival and earned a César nomination for Best Short Film (fiction).

In 1981 came *Diva*, which became an international hit, playing for over a year in some cinemas. Next came the expensive *The Moon in the Gutter*. Adapted from a David Goodis novel, the film was even more radical than *Diva* in its deliberate artificiality. The film was booed at its premiere at the Cannes Film Festival in 1983. Only few voices rose up to defend the movie but it was not enough to save it. It flopped at the box office but won a César award for Best Production Design.

Beineix bounced back in force in 1986 with *37°2 le matin (Betty Blue)*, based on a Philippe Djian novel. The film was another international hit, won the top prize at Montréal Film Festival, and was nominated for Best Foreign Film at both the Oscars and Golden Globes. It also earned 9 César nominations including Best Film and Best Director.

Beineix's next movie *Roselyne et les lions* (1989) was set in the circus world. In 1992, *IP5* featured Yves Montand's last role. Beineix then resurfaced with social documentaries. He did a film about children in Romania; *Otaku* was shot in Japan; and *Assigné à résidence* was about locked-in syndrome victim Jean-Dominique Bauby, the subject of Julian Schnabel's soon-to-be released film *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*.

In 2001, he returned to fiction with *Mortel Transfert*, a psychological thriller based on a Jean-Pierre Gattégno novel. In 2002, Beineix drew strong ratings with made-for-TV documentary *Loft Paradox*, an attempt to analyze the success of French reality show *Loft Story*.

With his intense focus on the power of images, Beineix paved the way for directors like Luc Besson, Leos Carax and Jean-Pierre Jeunet. With *Diva* and *37°2 le matin*, he directed two of the few French films of the 80s that reached an international audience.

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## **DELACORTA (novelist)**

Delacorta is the pen name of Daniel Odier, a Swiss novelist about whom Anaïs Nin once wrote "He is an outstanding writer and a dazzling poet".

Born in Geneva in 1945, he studied painting in Rome, received his university degree in Paris, and worked as a music critic for a leading Swiss newspaper before taking off for a tour of Asia which culminated in a book on Taoism. His first book, *The Job: interviews with William Burroughs*, was published in the United States in 1969. Since then he published seven novels in France under his real name. As Delacorta he wrote *Diva*, *Nana*, *Luna* and *Lola*, four breezy urban crime thrillers published between 1979 and 1980. Developing a reputation of chic trash, each of the Delacorta novels offers an energetically sexy romp through Paris's seedy underworld. The leading characters these four novels, as well as two later ones, are Serge Gorodish and his 13-year old accomplice Alba. Each novel introduces an engaging coterie of colorful supporting characters thrown into a whirlwind of thefts, kidnappings, dirty deals and double-crosses. The books proved so popular that for months the French literati were on a mission to discover the real name of the mysterious Delacorta.

## **PHILIPPE ROUSSELOT (Cinematographer)**

Among the most influential cinematographers of our time, Philippe Rousselot assisted Nestor Almendros on three Eric Rohmer films before graduating to director of photography in 1972. Rousselot had already enjoyed fruitful collaborations with directors Diane Kurys and Claude Goretta before landing in the spotlight with Jean-Jacques Beineix' s *Diva*. The film won him his first César award, as well as the Best Cinematography Award from the National Society of Film Critics, and kicked off a prestigious international career.

Rousselot won a second César for Alain Cavalier's *Therese* (1986) around the time he began venturing into English-language cinema, evoking the passions of the 18th century French aristocracy in *Dangerous Liaisons* (1988, ASC nomination for Best Cinematography) and those of 20th century literati Henry Miller and Anaïs Nin in *Henry and June* (1990, Oscar-nominated).

Rousselot has often worked with John Boorman, including on *Hope and Glory* (1987), which brought him a second Academy nomination and the British Society of Cinematographers award, and *The Emerald Forest* (1985). Woodlands have provided a showcase for some of Rousselot's finest work -- *A River Runs Through It* (1992), for which he earned a Best Cinematography Oscar, and *The*

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*Bear* (1988, ASC nomination), for which he built a number of camera mounts and other devices to ingeniously mimic a bear's-eye view of the world.

Rousselot returned to France to shoot the Patrice Chéreau's *Queen Margot* (1994), which earned him a third César. He subsequently provided the burnished tones for Neil Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (also 1994, winner of both the BAFTA and British Society of Cinematographer's award) and Stephen Frears' *Mary Reilly* (1996). In 1997, he stepped behind the camera to direct *The Serpent's Kiss*.

In the past few years he collaborated with Tim Burton -- *Planet of the Apes*, *Big Fish* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* were all photographed by Burton. He is the cinematographer of *The Brave One*, directed by Neil Jordan and starring Jodie Foster, currently in theatres.

## **HILTON McCONNICO (Production Designer)**

Born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1943, designer and artist Hilton McConnico has lived and worked in Paris since 1965 and has since established himself as one of the world's most accomplished designers.

After working in fashion for such designers as Ted Lapidus, Yves St. Laurent, and Balenciaga, he was set designer and art director for more than 20 films. He collaborated with Beineix on *Diva* and on 1983's *The Moon in the Gutter*, which earned him a César award for Best Production Design. He was also the production designer on Truffaut's final movie, *Confidentially Yours!* He then moved to the other side of the camera to produce some 30 commercials and video clips.

His collaboration with Daum Crystal began in 1987; some of his "Cactus" creations for the manufacturer were presented by former French President François Mitterrand to President George H. W. Bush as a gift of state. He was also the first American to have work permanently inducted into the Louvre's Decorative Arts collection. His "Cactus" creations and the "Pepper Carpets" of Toulemonde Bouchart are included in permanent collections throughout the world, including the decorative arts Museums of Paris, New York, Oslo and Lausanne.

McConnico continues to be active on the global design scene, especially in architecture and interior design. Recent projects include the *Touparry* restaurant on the fifth-floor of the historic Samaritaine department store in Paris and the

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Hermes Museum in Tokyo, which he conceived for the new Renzo Piano building in the famed Ginza shopping district. In 2005, the Sommet du luxe et de la creation (International luxury and design exhibition) recognized McConnico for his entire body of work with the Talent de L'Audace award. The January 2006 Scènes d'intérieur interior design exhibition paid him tribute in a retrospective created by McConnico himself.

## **VLADIMIR COSMA (Composer)**

One of France and Europe's most distinguished film composers, Vladimir Cosma has scored more than 150 films and TV productions. Though he enjoyed almost immediate success in comedies, he continued experimenting with different styles and genres, and this versatility brought him international acclaim.

Born in 1940 in Bucharest, Romania, the son of a renowned conductor and concert pianist, Cosma studied music from his early years onward, eventually attending the National Conservatory in Bucharest (from which he graduated with two first prizes, for violin and composition). In 1963 he went to Paris to advance his studies at the French Conservatory, where, in addition to his classical background, he developed an interest in jazz, folk music, and film music. Between 1964 and 1967, he toured the world as a concert violinist, visiting the U.S., Latin America, and Southeast Asia. A meeting with popular film composer Michel Legrand became the first step towards his future career. Although Cosma always mentions Legrand's importance, he also admits the influence of such composers as Burt Bacharach and Henri Mancini.

In 1967, Cosma began his long-running partnership with film director Yves Robert for whom he scored the international hits *The Tall Blond One with One Back Shoe* (1972) and its sequel, as well as Marcel Pagnol's autobiographical diptych, *La Gloire de Mon Père* and *Le Chateau de ma Mère* (both in 1990). He also wrote the music for several comedies directed by Francis Veber and Gerard Oury, starring such hit French comedians as Pierre Richard and Louis de Funès.

One of his biggest international hits was the Satie-inspired impressionistic piano pieces for the soundtrack for *Diva*, for which he was awarded his first César. He received another César for Ettore Scola's *Le Bal* (1983), and the main instrumental theme from it became a hit worldwide. He also received a Cannes Film Festival award for the entire body of his work. (Adapted from *All Movie Guide*)

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## **WILHELMENIA WIGGINS FERNANDEZ (Cynthia Hawkins)**

The American Soprano was born Philadelphia in 1949. Ms Fernandez's early training was at the Philadelphia Academy of Vocal Arts, followed by a scholarship at the Juilliard School of Music in New York. Her operatic debut was as Bess in *Porgy and Bess* for the Houston Grand Opera, a production which then opened on Broadway and toured both the U.S. and Europe.

In 1979, she made her début in Paris as Musetta in *La Boheme* (with Placido Domingo and Kiri Te Kanawa) and sang the same role at the New York City Opera in 1982. It was while performing Musetta in Paris that she met Jean-Jacques Beineix. She recalls that he went backstage for an autograph. Then he just stood and watched. When Fernandez asked him, "Is there something else?" he asked her to read a script. "Me? In a film? I'm not an actress, I'm an opera singer", she reported. The next day she handed the script back with a refusal. After Beineix convinced her to read the script with him, the idea grew more appealing. "I started thinking of reaching out to all those people who say they don't like opera because they don't understand it. I was hoping that I would entice more people to see opera."

Since *Diva*, the soprano has sung in operas and recitals in cities all over the world, her most notable roles were Carmen in *Carmen Jones*, for which she received the Laurence Olivier Theatre Award in 1992 as Best Actress in a Musical, and Giuseppe Verdi's *Aida*, a role she has performed in Luxor and at the Pyramids in Egypt.

Unlike her character in *Diva*, she has made recordings of George Gershwin and of Negro Spirituals.

## **FRÉDÉRIC ANDREI (Jules)**

Born in 1959, the son of a famous veteran TV director, Andrei first appeared in films by Yves Boisset and Michel Deville before landing the role of the opera loving postman in *Diva*. The success of the film allowed him to direct a short the following year, then a feature film, *Paris minuit*, in 1986. As an actor he has been seen in Eric Heumann's *Port Djema* (1996) and Tonie Marshall's hit comedy, *Venus Beauty Institute* (1998).

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## **RICHARD BOHRINGER (Gorodish)**

Born in Moulins, France in 1942, Richard Bohringer began his film acting career in 1970 but did not make his first career breakthrough until Francois Truffaut's *The Last Metro* (1980), before being launched to international stardom by his role of Gorodish in *Diva*.

In 1985, director Luc Besson cast him in *Subway*, starring Isabelle Adjani and Christopher Lambert. That same year, Bohringer received a Best Supporting Actor César for his role in Denis Amar's 1984 prison melodrama *L'Addition*. In 1988, he received his second César, this time as Best Actor, for Jean-Loup Hubert's *Le Grand Chemin*. In 1989 he was The Cook in Peter Greenaway's *The Cook the Thief His Wife & Her Lover*.

Counting some 130 roles to date in both feature films and TV, Bohringer has notably worked Claude Miller, Patrice Leconte, Idrissa Ouedraogo, Jean-Pierre Mocky, Kim Ki-Duk, Robin Davis, Charles Matton, Peter Bogdanovich, Michel Deville, Jean-Charles Tachella, and others. In 1997, he won France's TV award Sept D'Or for his performance in the mini-series *Un homme en colère*.

Bohringer is the author of plays, scripts, books and travel writings, and has also directed for cinema and TV, notably the 2003 feature, *C'est beau une ville la nuit*, based on his 1988 book. A lover of Africa, Bohringer took Senegalese citizenship in 2002.

## **THUY AN LUU (Alba)**

Discovered by Beineix's casting director Dominique Besnehard, the supposedly-15-year-old Thuy An Luu impressed the director so much that he rewrote the part of Lolita-like Alba, changing her from a North African to a Vietnamese girl. She subsequently appeared in a handful for films and TV productions, then dropped out of sight in the late 80s.

## **DOMINIQUE PINON (The Priest)**

Rubber-faced French actor Dominique Pinon was born in 1955. It was casting director Dominique Besnehard who recommended him to Beineix for the role of the laconic man, The Priest, in *Diva*, a role that brought him to international attention and remains among his signature roles. In 1983, Pinon received a César nomination as Most Promising Actor for his performance in *The Return of Martin Guerre* (1982). His unusual and pronounced features led him to play a series of secondary characters in important films. He was the alcoholic brother

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of Gérard Depardieu in Beineix's second feature *The Moon in the Gutter* (1983), a bum in Ermanno Olmi's *The Legend of the Holy Drinker* (1988) and a vagabond in Roman Polanski's *Frantic* (1988).

*Diva* aside, Pinon is best known for his work with Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet. His malleable, idiosyncratic features made him seem a natural part of Caro and Jeunet's surreal landscape, as demonstrated in both *Delicatessen* (1991) and *La Cité Des Enfants Perdus* (The City of Lost Children, 1995). In 1997, he collaborated with Jeunet alone on a rare American outing, *Alien Resurrection*, in which he played a paralyzed mechanic opposite Sigourney "Ripley" Weaver and Wynona Ryder. In 2001 and 2005, Jeunet cast him once again in the international smash hit, *Amelie*, and *A Very Long Engagement*. In 2004, he received the Molière Award (France's national theatre award) for his comic performance in a Roland Topor play.

## **GÉRARD DARMON (The Caribbean)**

Born in Paris in 1948, Gérard Darmon has played a wide variety of roles in many different genres to become one of France's most popular supporting actors. His first major role was in Gérard Oury's farce, *The Mad Adventures of Rabbi Jacob* (1973), but it was *Diva* and Alexandre Arcady's Jewish gangster epic, *Le Grand Pardon* (1981), that brought him critical and public attention. He received his first César nomination as Best Supporting Actor in Beineix' *37°2 le matin* (Betty Blue, 1986) and became a regular player in a series of Claude Lelouch films. Darmon won his second Best Supporting Actor César nomination for *Astérix et Obélix: Mission Cléopâtre* (2002) and co-starred opposite Nick Nolte in Neil Jordan's *The Good Thief*, a remake of Rialto Pictures' *Bob Le Flambeur*. Winner of the Jean Gabin Prize in 1983, Darmon recently branched out into music with two albums of pop songs and a couple of performances at the prestigious Olympia music hall in Paris.

## **JACQUES FABBRI (Saporta)**

Distinguished French actor Jacques Fabbri was born in Paris in 1925. He was the founder of a theatrical company. In 1965, he directed *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Comédie Française and made his debut as film director with the comedy *Les pieds dans le plâtre*. In his long career as a character actor, he appeared in many plays and films, including Jacques Becker's *Rendez-vous de Juillet* (1949) and René Clair's *Les Grandes Manoeuvres* (1955). He died in 1997.

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## LENNY BORGER (subtitles)

*Diva* is translator/subtitled Lenny Borger's 26th collaboration with Rialto Pictures, which began with the 1998 re-release of *Grand Illusion*. A former Paris *Variety* correspondent, the Brooklyn-born expatriate has also subtitled recent films by Bertrand Tavernier, Jean-Luc Godard and Claude Chabrol and has written new titles for such classics as *Rififi*, *Band of Outsiders*, *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *Casque d'or*, *Le Corbeau*, *Rules of the Game*, Raymond Bernard's *Les Misérables*, and four Jean-Pierre Melville pictures – *Bob Le Flambeur*, *Le Cercle Rouge*, *Le Doulos* and *Army of Shadows* - among many others.

## ABOUT RIALTO PICTURES

Described as “the gold standard of reissue distributors” by Los Angeles Times/NPR film critic Kenneth Turan, Rialto Pictures was founded in 1997 by Bruce Goldstein. A year later, Adrienne Halpern joined him as partner. In 2002, Eric Di Bernardo became the company's National Sales Director.

**Rialto's past releases** have included Renoir's *Grand Illusion*; Carol Reed's *The Third Man* and *The Fallen Idol*; Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*; Jules Dassin's *Rififi*; De Sica's *Umberto D*; Godard's *Contempt*, *Two or Three Things*, *Band of Outsiders*, *Masculine Feminine*, *A Woman is a Woman* and *Two or Three Things I Know About Her*; Julien Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko*; Buñuel's *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *Diary of a Chambermaid*, *The Phantom of Liberty*, *The Milky Way* and *That Obscure Object of Desire*; Claude Berri's *The Two of Us* (and his Oscar-winning short *Le Poulet*); Louis Malle's *Elevator to the Gallows*; John Schlesinger's *Billy Liar*; Clouzot's *Quai des Orfèvres*; Mike Nichols' *The Graduate*; The Maysles' *Grey Gardens*; Mel Brooks' *The Producers*; Claude Sautet's *Classe Tous Risques*; Jacques Becker's *Touchez Pas Au Grisbi*; Bresson's *Au Hasard Balthazar* and *Mouchette*; Franju's *Eyes Without A Face*; and Jean-Pierre Melville's *Bob le Flambeur* and *Le Cercle Rouge*, the latter released for the first time in its uncut European version.

**In 2002, the company released the critically-acclaimed first-run film *Murderous Maids***, the chilling true story of two homicidal sisters, starring Sylvie Testud.

**Rialto celebrated a record-breaking 2004** with the previously unreleased, original 1954 Japanese version of Ishiro Honda's *Godzilla*; Peter Davis's Oscar-winning and newly-restored 1974 documentary *Hearts and Minds*; and Gillo

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Pontecorvo's groundbreaking *The Battle of Algiers*, which became one of the year's top-grossing foreign films.

**In 2006, Rialto released Melville's 1969 epic masterpiece *Army of Shadows*** for the very first time in the United States. *Army of Shadows* became the most critically acclaimed film of the year, topping many Ten Best lists, including those in *The New York Times* and *Premiere*, and was named Best Foreign Film of 2006 by the New York Film Critics' Circle, in addition to receiving special awards from the Los Angeles Film Critics and National Film Critics associations.

**Rialto's latest rediscovery is Alberto Lattuada's *Mafioso***, a dark comedy from 1962 that became the unqualified highlight of the 2006 New York Film Festival. Also currently in release is Jean-Pierre Melville's *Le Doulos* starring Jean-Paul Belmondo. Upcoming releases include Alain Resnais' classic *Last Year at Marienbad*, opening in January at Film Forum in New York.

**In 1999 Rialto received a special Heritage Award from the National Society of Film Critics** and in 2000 received a special award from the New York Film Critic's Circle, presented to Goldstein and Halpern by Jeanne Moreau. The two co-presidents have each received the French Order of Chevalier of Arts and Letters.

**2007 marks Rialto's tenth anniversary**, a milestone that was celebrated this past July with a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

**Pressbook edited by Tommaso Cammarano and Adrienne Halpern  
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