

LADIES & GENTLEMEN,

We now ask for your complete attention.

If you want to sing, laugh, clap,

cry, yawn,

boo or fart,

Please, do it in your head,

only in your head.

You are now kindly requested to keep silent
and to hold your breath until the very end of the show.

Breathing will not be tolerated during the show.

So, please take a deep, last breath right now.

CG CINÉMA INTERNATIONAL PRESENTS
A CG CINÉMA INTERNATIONAL AND TRIBUS P FILMS INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTION

ADAM DRIVER

MARION COTILLARD

AND SIMON HELBERG



FESTIVAL DE CANNES
OPENING FILM
COMPETITION
OFFICIAL SELECTION 2021

ANNETTE

A FILM BY
LEOS CARAX

Original story and music by SPARKS
Lyrics by Ron Mael, Russell Mael & LC

Length: 2H20

With **Marion Cotillard, Adam Driver, Simon Helberg**

Produced by **Charles Gillibert** (CG Cinéma Int), **Paul-Dominique Vacharasinthu** (Tribus P. Films), **Adam Driver**

Distribution in France by **UGC Distribution**

Distribution in North America by **Amazon Studios**

International Sales **Kinology**

World Premiere in Cannes & French release: **July 6, 2021**

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Festival Screenings in Cannes:

Tuesday July 6th | 9:00 am (Salle Bazin) – Selective Press Screening (RSVP, on list)

Tuesday July 6th | 7:25 pm (Grand Théâtre Lumière) – Opening Ceremony & Official Screening

Tuesday July 6th | 7:25 pm (Salle Debussy) – Opening Ceremony & Press Screening

Tuesday July 6th | 9:30 pm (Salle Bazin) – Press Screening



Synopsis

Los Angeles, nowadays. Henry is a stand-up comedian with a fierce sense of humor, Ann a singer of international renown. In the spotlight, they are the perfect couple, healthy, happy, and glamorous. The birth of their first child, Annette, a mysterious girl with an exceptional gift, will change their lives.

AN INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR LEOS CARAX

When did you first encounter the music of Sparks?

When I was 13 or 14, a few years after I discovered Bowie. The first album of theirs I got (stole, actually) was *Propaganda*. And then, *Indiscreet*. Those are still two of my favorite pop albums today. But later, for years, I wasn't really aware of what Sparks was doing, because by the age of 16, I started to focus on cinema.

And when and how did you meet brothers Ron and Russell Mael?

A year or two after my previous film, *Holy Motors*, came out. There's a scene in which Denis Lavant plays a song from *Indiscreet* in his car: "How Are You Getting Home?" So they knew I liked their work, and contacted me about a musical project. A fantasy about Ingmar Bergman, trapped in Hollywood and unable to escape the city. But that wasn't for me: I could never do something that is set in the past, and I wouldn't make a film with a character called Ingmar Bergman. A few months later they sent me about 20 demos and the idea for *Annette*.

What has been your relationship to musical films? Even in your older films it feels like at times musicals are itching to break out of them. You often had these incredible set pieces with characters expressing themselves through song and dance. Is the idea of making a musical something you've been thinking about for a long time?

Ever since I began making films. I had imagined my third film, *Lovers on the Bridge*, as a musical. The big problem, my big regret, is that I can't compose music myself. And how do you choose, work with, a composer? That worried me.

I didn't watch many musicals when I was young. I remember seeing Brian De Palma's *Phantom of the Paradise*, around the same time I discovered Sparks. I eventually saw American, Russian, and Indian musicals later. And of course, Jacques Demy's films.

Musicals give cinema another dimension —almost literally: you have time, space, and music. And they bring an amazing freedom. You can direct a scene by following the music's lead, or by going against the music. You can mix all sorts of contradictory emotions, in a way that is impossible in films where people don't sing or dance. You can be grotesque and profound at the same time. And silence, silence becomes something new: not just silence in contrast with spoken words and the sounds of the world, but a deeper one.

Was Annette always meant to take on a sort of rock opera musical form?

There was always the operatic, some rock but not much, and Sparks' unique mix.

I have always been struck by how you take formal and experimental risks, but you're also not afraid to make visual gags with these very physical actors. Annette is about two performers. How did you conceive of how to show their performance domains?

I first wondered: why is she an opera singer, why is he a stand-up comedian? Sparks' world is pop fantasy, with multilayered irony. But I had to take it all seriously at first. And I knew nothing about opera, and just a little about stand-up comedy. I quickly became very interested. These two forms, so far apart, do share a few things. The nakedness, vulnerability, of opera singers and comedians on stage. The game with death: opera is basically women dying on stage, in every possible way, while singing their most beautiful, poignant song, called the aria; and great comedians, like Andy Kaufman, are the ones who flirt with death on stage. Grotesque is essential to comedy, while *serious* opera avoids it, but is often mocked as grotesque anyway. And singing and laughing are both very organic: they rely on a complex anatomic system, the same vital system for how we breathe.

I started to see the whole film as a metaphor for breathing: life and death of course, and laughing, singing, giving birth, holding your breath, ... Also, breathing as a musical rhythm.

In the prologue, we can hear your voice asking the audience to stay focused and to hold their breath!

Which now takes on a new meaning, since *Annette* will come out in this Covid time, when you're not supposed to breathe too much in the company of others. *Life and death*, again.

Backstage musicals, like *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, the films of Vincente Minelli and Busby Berkeley, sometimes make profound comments about the essence of performance and connecting to the audience. Was that on your mind when you were making Annette?

When Sparks gave me their first songs and a treatment, I had one big concern: the guy was a stand-up comedian, but there was no sense of what his act was like.

I had seen some stand-up in France, as a kid and later. And through my parents, I've always loved Tom Lehrer. He was a math teacher who started doing stand-up in the 1950s, singing and playing piano. His songs are very tongue in cheek —a little like Sparks' actually. In my first film, I had stolen this line from him: "*It is a sobering thought that when Mozart was my age, he had been dead for two years.*" And I used a bit of one of his songs in *Annette* — but this time with his permission.

I also knew Lenny Bruce's and Andy Kaufman's work. I started reading biographies about them and others —Richard Pryor, Steve Martin, ... Some comedians vomit out of panic before their act. To enter the stage *knowing that you have to make people laugh...* Must be terrifying. Like if I were forced to go on stage at Cannes... and to go naked.

So there was a dual theme: opera, the woman who dies on stage, with music and grace; and stand-up, which involves grotesque —and provocation, to the point where it can become self-destructive, as you can see if you watch any great comedian perform.

The story of Annette is so archetypal and contemporary at the same time. I thought about *A Star Is Born*, *Pinocchio*, *Beauty and the Beast*... Do you remember your first emotional response to the story when Sparks presented it to you?

I loved the songs right away. I felt fortunate, and grateful. But at first I told them I couldn't do the film. I had personal worries. I have a young daughter —she was 9 at the time. And although the brothers knew nothing of my life (I think), there were some things in the storyline that could upset her. And did I really want to —could I— make a film about such a "bad father," at this time in my life? But as I was listening to the songs over and over again, she started to love them too and asked me what they were. I told her and realized she already understood a lot; and that by the time the film would get made (if it ever did), she would understand how a film project comes to life. So I said "Yes."

At the time, did you have to find strategies to make the film your own, so you could make it?

Music is so intimate. I couldn't see myself doing a musical if I didn't feel for every note in every song. I was worried about that, especially since we were trying to have the whole film in songs. Musicals usually have 10 or 20 songs—with often half of them boring. But we had to create 40 songs: 40 songs I could see, then film. And how do you work with music when you're not yourself a musician?

But the process with Sparks was miraculously simple: they're very inventive and humble and fast, with that unique sense of melody and rhythm, melancholy and joy. And I'd known their music for so long; it felt like going back to my childhood house decades later—but a house with no ghosts.

There's a risk, when you have so many songs, however great they are, that the film will become a cloying cake. Or a jukebox playing too loud too long. Which would have killed the experience. So you have to be very careful with the total score, the same way you have to be with the totality of your film when you edit a sequence. It's a matter of finding the film's natural breath.

Another concern was: how to create Henry? A Henry I could relate to. And what true father-daughter relationship could I imagine, in this context of "exploitation?"

Can you talk a bit about the opening sequence, with the "So May We Start" song? Is it meant to be an introduction to the film?

Not really to the film, more to the film's specific form. It owes a lot to Sondheim's great *Invocation And Instructions To The Audience*. And also, to the tradition of the opera prologue, especially the beautiful one from Bartok's *Bluebeard's Castle*.

As with the first scene of *Holy Motors*, you're in it.

Yes, and again with my daughter. I had imagined it for me, her, and our dogs (but we couldn't bring the dogs to LA.) For *Holy Motors*, it was important to be there with her at the very beginning of the film. Probably to reassure myself, after all these years of not making films, that we were just doing a small experimental home movie. In my mind, these last two films are experimental films. *Annette* is a big one; *Holy Motors* was a small one. I think of them as "films I have made since becoming a father."

It's interesting to compare both films: *Holy Motors* was so experimental, and you're right *Annette* is as well, but it has much more of a traditional story arc.

Much more than any of my other films I would say. That comes from Sparks. They came with this dark fairytale, which I think respected.

Toward the end of *Holy Motors*, Kylie Minogue sings a song that mentions having a child...

Losing a child, actually. It was the first time I wrote lyrics for a film. Neil Hannon, from The Divine Comedy, wrote the song's music. A very good experience, and a step closer to making a musical. I had always worried about what would happen if I asked someone to write music, and then didn't like it. But we got to a song I liked a lot, and filming Kylie was beautiful. So it gave me confidence.

Did you have the desire to make a film in America before this?

To make a film in English, for sure. English was my native language. But no, shooting in America was never a strong desire. About 20 years ago, I had a project called *Scars*, a tale set in Russia and America—New York, and on the road to the West Coast. And in the 1990s, an adaptation of *Peter Ibbetson*, set in France and America. In those years, after *Lovers on the Bridge*, it was impossible for me to make films in France. So I considered making films in the US. It seemed possible, or less impossible.

Annette also started as an American project, with producers in L.A. I kept getting emails from them, with the word "hyperexcited" written all over them—but nothing was really happening. So I brought the project back to Europe.

Can you talk about shooting in L.A.?

The film was imagined for L.A. The Mael brothers live there, were born there. In all these years of pre-production, I was asked again and again to move the film out of L.A, because shooting there is so expensive. I tried to imagine other cities but they didn't work as well. I wanted Henry to travel on his motorbike like a cowboy, between his world and Ann's world, and that wouldn't have worked in New York, Paris or Toronto. So we had to reinvent LA, mostly in Belgium and Germany (which are not very

Californian countries.) A fantasy version of a fantasy city. We only shot in LA for a week: the prologue, the motorbike shots, the forest amid the canyons and hills.

You've worked with cinematographer Caroline Champetier after Jean-Yves Escoffier, and editor Nelly Quettier. Can you say something about these enduring collaborations?

When I started in cinema, I was always the youngest on set, apart from the main actor and actress. And I was working mostly with men on the crew. But now, it's quite the opposite: I'm almost the oldest on set, and work mostly with women. I met Nelly on my second film, and we haven't stopped working together ever since. I have trouble saying in what ways she's so special since I've hardly known any other editor. She's wonderful. Both as a collaborator and a human being. Very loyal, very generous. We fight quite a bit, but it never lasts.

I met Caroline much later, for a small film we made in Tokyo about 12 years ago***. I had shot my first three films in the 80s with Jean-Yves, and when he suddenly died in LA, I knew I would not, could not, shoot on film anymore. Not without him. So I discovered digital cinema through Caroline. It was a nightmare but also, thanks to her, a way to save myself. I owe her a lot, and she's another very generous and loyal person. I ask for a lot of time from my main collaborators on a film. Caroline was working with me on *Annette* three years before the shoot. Not many cinematographers would accept that —maybe none.

*** *Merde*, part of the 2008 anthology film *Tokyo!*

***Annette* is a return to the boy-meets-girl theme of your past films. I saw shades of Alex [Denis Lavant's characters in the first three features] and Pierre [Guillaume Depardieu in *Pola X*] in Henry. They meet someone that they have this intense spiritual attraction to, but because they can't live up to their own high expectations of either the relationship or themselves, they submit to this death drive of destroying themselves and the relationship. Do you see a connection between those male characters?**

I see a connection between the actors: Denis, Guillaume, Adam. First of all, they're interesting people, and not all actors are. I had only seen Adam in the TV series *Girls*, and I thought, like Prince Myshkin when he sees Nastasya Filippovna for the first time: "What an extraordinary face." And also, an extraordinary body. He reminded me a little of Denis, although Denis is short —my size— and has a face people call strange. Adam is tall, with a beautiful face that some people would also call strange. Guillaume and Adam share a similar physicality: they're strong, feline, very handsome young men, with something both feminine and masculine.

In terms of the characters they play, I guess they do have some similarities. They want to save, but they destroy. These days, I'm working on short videos for an exhibit next year***. One film is about male characters in films made by men. It's called: "Man, cinema forgives you everything." Maybe I should add a question mark.

*** At The Centre Beaubourg Pompidou, May-June 2022

In Henry's performances, he talks a lot about laughter, but it's not a joyful laughter that's in the film. He uses very personal aspects of his life as fodder to make people laugh, and then later on he uses laughter as a menacing weapon against his wife.

Laughter becomes a question of life and death. We needed to invent two very different shows that would fit into the narrative. That was a big challenge, hard work. I forgot how many versions we tried, all very different. And since at first we wanted everything to be sung, it meant writing the entire shows into lyrics —and it had to be funny in a way no other comedian has ever been funny. I couldn't find a way to do that. Then one day I thought: maybe Henry doesn't always have to sing; he could go from singing to talking to mime. I felt liberated.

I was consulting an American friend, Lauren Sedovsky, on the project. She knows a lot, about everything: art, literature, philosophy, ... She told me about this old mime play by Paul Margueritte, called *Pierrot assassin de sa femme****, in which Pierrot searches for the best way to kill his wife, and finally decides to tickle her to death. It was the perfect inspiration for our laughter, breath and death theme.

*** *Pierrot, Murderer of his Wife* —1881

Yes, tickling plays a big role in the film. It's a sign of affection but there is also something dangerous and taboo about it. It's an uncivilized act, in many ways.

Yes, childish and savage. There is the same morbidity, and obscenity, in singing and laughing. And sex. Tickling is sexual too. If you're going to make a film in songs, you have to show all these more or less taboo things, people fucking and doing those other things you never see in musicals for some reason.

Often in musicals, like Bollywood films, scenes are coded representations of those acts. But here in *Annette* you show it and they sing it.

One Indian cineast, Guru Dutt, played with those codes beautifully. He was a kind of Orson Welles, did everything on his films — wrote them, directed them, acted and sung in them. And, like Welles, he was self-destructive. He made two of my favorite musicals, in the 1950s: *Paper Flowers* and *Thirsty*.

Did Adam Driver have any input into Henry's monologues on stage?

Not in terms of writing but in terms of acting, very much so. I usually don't rehearse, ever, hate it. But I did rehearse the two shows with him, each one for a day, at the beginning of the shoot. To reassure Adam. And myself, too. We knew each other so little. I also needed to check the rhythm of these two long sequences, and how Henry should move on stage. How he would play with his mike, etc. And Adam proposed many things. So the shows were really a collaborative creation between Sparks, Adam and I.

Tell me how you came to work with Marion Cotillard?

L.C: I first met with American actresses (Ann was supposed to be an American). But I couldn't find Ann. Then I thought of singers who could maybe act, but still couldn't find her. I was getting worried: apart from money and reputation, the other main reason I have made so few films is what people call "casting". I see casting as a totally un-natural and absurd practice. And each time I had imagined a project without an actor and actress in mind, I had to abandon it — could never find the right actors. So I felt doomed. What would happen if I never found Ann? Could I, for the first time, force myself to work with an actress I didn't really want to film?

A few years before we finally shot *Annette*, I met with Marion. Without much hope since, for some reason, I thought we wouldn't get along. So I was surprised to actually like her very much, and believe in her for Ann. But there was, of course, a problem: Marion was pregnant so couldn't shoot when we were supposed to.

But the film kept getting delayed anyway because, as always, financing and production were a mess: I had to change producers three times, etc. So two years later, I offered the part to Marion again, and Adam and I were very glad when she said "Yes." During the shoot I felt, and still feel today, very grateful for what she brings to the film. Marion has the grace and mystery of a silent film actress. I would've liked to film her more.

What about the choice of Simon Helberg for the part of The Conductor?

A bit of the same story. During all these years before shooting, I couldn't find an actor who could really play the piano, sing, and whom I'd want to film. I had never seen Simon in anything; we just had a drink once. But again, he turned out to be a blessing for the film. Simon is very special, an elf, and the camera loved the contrast between him and Adam.

Why did you decide to film the audience of Henry's performances?

Sparks had written a song called "*Ok, ready? Laugh!*" where the audience laughs while singing, and the only lyrics were "Ha ha ha ha!". I thought it was wonderful and wanted more of that, so that at times the shows would be like a duet between Henry and his audience.

You said that you don't like rehearsing with your actors. I was wondering if you do any of the traditional things when you direct them? Do you do blocking? How do you set up your shots? How do you know when it's right?

These questions are always hard for me to answer. Cinema is something I've done so sporadically, just a few films in 40 years, and when I'm not in the action, I tend to completely forget how it's done, or how I do it. I can't see myself doing it. But I think it always involves an obscure mix of extreme precision and extreme chaos.

Directing has a lot to do with choreography, all the more so for a film like *Annette*. Although it's a musical without any dancing, the music and singing force everything to move differently. And if you do it right, bodies, cars, trees appear to be dancing.

Working with actors is, again, all about precision and chaos. Marion is at ease with both, but more on the precision side. Adam, at different times, needs one more than the other. So for some scenes, he would feel lost, get mad. I was asking for too much precision, or leaving him in too deep a chaos. Those scenes are of course the ones in which he delivers his most inventive and inspired work. Maybe we're a bit the same in this way. I loved filming Adam.

I shoot many takes. Less now than I used to —since I've turned to digital, I don't watch dailies anymore, so I don't feel the need to retake every shot like I used to.

Sometimes, you want another take because you're looking for something specific. But more often, it's the opposite: you need to get lost, to reach a point that is, to me, like a *déjà vu* illusion ("a memory of the present"): where it seems like you're in the middle of a dream... or that you have seen or dreamt this before... "*I've been here before*," but I never knew it.

In *Annette*, the songs replace regular, naturalistic dialogue. You get used to characters singing to each other. How did you decide for the songs to take on a very casual conversational quality and how did you communicate that to the actors?

The first decision was to have the actors sing live. An evident choice for me, but not easy for the people involved —sound people, camera people, money people, and the actors of course. It implies not going for the performance. Singing becomes more natural, like breathing. It's something that's quite moving to do, and to watch.

It was easier for Adam than for Marion I think. Marion always felt her voice could be better; Adam didn't have this concern so much. Once we started shooting, he was an actor, not a singer. I like how both of them sing in the film, each in a very personal way.

Is it a coincidence that Henry's robe and leather jacket are the same color as Mr. Merde's suit in *Tokyo!*?

No. I fell in love with that green. It's very intense, especially filmed at night or in a dark theater. Now, my whole apartment is covered in different shades of that green. If you look at *Mauvais Sang* (which doesn't mean *Badly Sang*, but *Bad Blood*), it's all red, black, and blue. I'd never used green before I made *Merde*. But now, don't know why, I'm in a green and yellow phase. So Henry is green and Ann is yellow.

The romance itself is very complex, but the imagery of it is almost storybook-like and fantastical.

In French, we call this cliché imagery *roman-photo*. It was there in Sparks' original treatment, of course. I was cautious of it, because it brings irony, which can disarm everything and be tiresome. But it's interesting as a counterpoint to what's about to come.

In all my previous "boy meets girl" films, the lovers met in the course of the film. But in *Annette*, we understand they have just met, right before the start of the film. I liked this idea, but it's hard to do: not to show the encounter, only the shyness, the awkwardness and apprehension of new love.

I remember you saying that a lot of films start as a single image for you. Was there one for *Annette* that triggered the rest of the film?

Since it was not my original project but Sparks', *Annette* really started with the music, their music. The vertigo of music. And although I didn't write any of it obviously, I often felt more like a composer than a filmmaker. Which I guess has sometimes been the case on my other projects anyway.

I didn't have any actors in mind, and especially had no idea how to show a baby, from age zero to six... a baby who could sing... The film seemed impossible to make. But I'm used to that, and every film should be impossible to make.

The first image that came to me was more of a feeling or an intuition: a tiny star, alone and lost in the dark infinite —the smallness of *Annette* in the face of the world. And then I thought of Masha, a little Ukrainian girl. Years ago, I had lived with her young mother and her, in Ukraine. She was two years old then, and a wonderful child. At times, she almost looked like an old lady; but she was beautiful, in a very particular way that moved me. Masha would be the inspiration for *Annette*.



You once mentioned that animation wasn't really your wheelhouse. Do you still feel that way?

Yes. I can enjoy it for a few minutes, if my daughter really insists, I watch a Miyazaki with her for example, but I'm not interested in it. I like real movement. And my love for cinema starts with: a person looking at another person. A man filming a woman of his choice, a woman filming a man of her choice. I like filming nature, cities, a gun, engines, fireworks and explosions, ... But I need above all a face, a human body. Skin, eyes —and the emotions reflected in them.

Annette herself is at first this puppet figure. How did you come to that decision?

Like most decisions, by first saying "No, no, no" to many things. "No" to a digital baby; "No" to 3D imagery. By personal taste or distaste, and because of what they call "the uncanny valley." *** Which would've been even uncannier in the case of a small child. And because if you do it digitally, it's all post-production, which is anti-emotional. I couldn't see myself shooting the film without Annette among us on the set, by herself or in the arms of the actors.

Then I said "No" to using robotics or animatronics: Annette had to be someone, something I could understand, not a computer. Something simple, hand-crafted. So I thought of a puppet. I knew nothing about puppetry —but at least, hopefully, someone could create an emotional puppet.

*** A concept suggesting that [humanoid](#) objects which imperfectly resemble actual human beings provoke [uncanny](#) feelings of eeriness and revulsion in observers

It's a big risk that you took.

An exciting one. But did I have a choice?

And, maybe for the first time, I had to really think of a future audience: were people going to accept a film in which a puppet suddenly appears, and nobody ever mentions she's a puppet? A film in which none of the other characters, played by real people, ever see her as a puppet (except Henry, maybe). But the film is a musical, and I don't make naturalistic films anyway, so the reality of the film was already out of this world.

I imagined the scene in which Ann gives birth to Annette as a way to introduce the baby puppet to the audience. In the world of the film, she's a real baby, but we can see right away that she's not a baby of flesh and blood.

How did you find the puppeteers?

At first, Annette was an American project, so I started working with sculptors in L.A. Then the film became a French-Japanese co-production, and I worked with a Japanese puppeteer woman in Tokyo. But I could never see Annette, never find her, and it was becoming a nightmare. And then I met Gisèle Vienne, a gifted artist, theater director and choreographer. Like Rimbaud, she was born in Charleville, which is now the world's most renowned place for puppetry. She introduced me to a few people she went to school with there, at the National School for Puppetry Arts.

That's how I met a young woman called Estelle (Charlier). I liked her right away, believed in her. I gave her a few pictures of little Masha, and some weeks later, she sent me photos of her first version of Annette, very rough and beautiful. Annette became possible. Estelle then introduced me to Romuald

(Collinet), who had studied with her at the Charleville school. They had worked together ever since, making their own puppets and shows. She would create Annette's faces at different ages, and he would take care of Annette's body and all the technical stuff. Estelle and Romuald saved the film.

Were they on set with you?

Yes, every time Annette was. They were puppeteering her —with one or two more puppeteers, at times. Or they were nearby while I was shooting with actors, trying things with her for scenes to come, and then showing me videos. Adam, Marion and Simon did some puppeteering too, but Estelle and Romuald were always there, hiding somewhere, under a bed or wherever.

That's a rare, amazing handmade detail for a film that's made today.

We are proud of that. The only post-production involved was erasing the puppeteers when they couldn't hide completely off-screen.

You used the word "real." Cinema is a medium that contends with realism, yet your films have taken on more heightened artifice over the years. I'm wondering how you would account for the dissonance between trying to get at this realism through your films and these heightened artifices that you take on in order to get there?

The question of cinema and realism is an old one. I never really understood what realism is anyway. Every cineast has to invent his or her own classicism —his or her *cinematic reality*.

From the start, I liked shooting on built sets, and to use wigs, prosthesis and stuff like that. On my second film, I started dyeing the actors' hair and using colored contact lenses. In my third film, the Parisian bridge and its surroundings were sets, built in the countryside south of France. Mr. Merde, obviously, is a complete creation: fake beard, nails, eyes, fake everything... And the whole world of Holy Motors is torn between artifice and reality. I do like a few cineasts who confront naked reality, but I tend to go more and more toward artifice. I do hope my films are real, though.

With the *Showbiz News* bits, does the film try to get at the notion of celebrity and how it can be such a destructive force in 2021?

That has more to do with the *roman-photo* aspect of the film's first part. The couple is "rich and famous." I find it very difficult to film rich people. Again, this irony problem. The two films of mine that do portray rich people, *Pola X* and *Annette*, are the only ones based on stories I didn't imagine myself***. Sadly, I am not Douglas Sirk, and the times have changed since the 50s, when the rich & famous could still be seen as substitutes for vain and vulnerable gods in a Greek tragedy.

But success is very interesting —I also used the theme in *Pola X*. Whether one wants it or not, and then achieves it or not, and then whether success is personally successful: whether it makes you grow or shrink.

*** *Pola X* is adapted from Herman Melville's novel *Pierre; or, The Ambiguities*.

Ann's fame is obviously a cause of unease for Henry. It made me think of *A Star Is Born*. He's often talking in deprecating ways about himself in relation to her success and that feeds into what one might call his toxic masculinity.

I had decided that Henry would come from a poor and violent childhood, while Ann would come from a boring but safe childhood. There's also the fact that opera is seen as high, refined, art; whereas stand-up is considered a popular or even vulgar art. So there's almost a class war there. Of course, like in many love stories, this discrepancy is one of the reasons they fall in love in the first place —the press calls them "Beauty and the Bastard". But then, Henry becomes like these guys who see a stripper in a club, fall in love with her, marry her, and then beat her up because she's a stripper.

You've often talked about your love for King Vidor. Watching *Annette*, I thought of *The Crowd*, and James Murray's character in relation to Henry McHenry. He's so smitten with Eleanor Boardman's character and then there is a fall from grace. And the very end of the film is a discomfiting moment of them laughing at a vaudeville performance, but of course there's no joy in their laughter because of everything that we have just seen.

Yes, a few scenes before, Murray has attempted suicide, not far from his young son.

And the couple has lost a child, too.

Yes. I've always felt very close to that film. Another silent Vidor film — *Show people*— was important for *Annette*. It's about cinema and love, with also a sort of class struggle. Marion Davies and William Haines are both actors in low-budget burlesque films. They meet and fall in love. But then she's offered *serious* parts, dramas, tragedies, and becomes famous and praised for them; whereas he goes on being a comic figure. So they're torn apart. Wonderful. In these two films, Vidor portrays men who are like children, nice men but very immature and self-centered. They are kids, who sometimes happen to have kids.

I was struck by one of the lines in Henry's performance: "Comedy is the only way to tell the truth without getting killed."

Oscar Wilde said something like that. But we all have to go through this. We all have to find our way of telling the truth without getting killed. I mean the truth about ourselves.

And what about the motif of monkeys in the film?

When I was small, my father had a female chimpanzee, Zouzou. She was very jealous. He kept her in the bathroom next to the parents' bedroom, on a long chain, and at night she would jump on the bed and attack my mother. A few years later, I had two monkeys of my own, Saï and Miri, small ones with long tails. It was a very sad, very morbid experience. They got sick, dehydrated. I put them in a small drawer in my desk with some cotton, and each time I opened the drawer I would see them trembling. We finally had to euthanize them. Monkeys represent both dangerous wildness and martyrdom. I love them.

How did monkeys get into *Annette*? I think it was the result, as it often is, of a few coincidences. I was looking for a title for Henry's show, and remembered that some ancient theologian had called Satan "Le singe de Dieu." So I called the show, "The Ape of God," which sounds like a wrestler's ring name. Then the puppeteers suggested that baby *Annette* could have her own toy, a teddy bear, and I liked the image of a puppet puppeteering another, smaller creature. But I chose a monkey, not a bear. And then I saw that one of the young puppeteers had created, for one of her own shows, a big Kink Kong puppet, and I absolutely wanted to use it in some way in the film. So gradually, monkeys invaded the film, and became a link between father and daughter, savagery and childhood.

You always have motorcycles in your films, and you talked about having a motorcycle when you were young. Does the use of the motorcycle come intuitively to you?

I still have a motorcycle. You can dream on a motorcycle. I just love to film people riding one, especially at night: a man or woman in love, or a couple, so vulnerable, on these powerful engines. The search for speed and zero gravity. What Léo Ferré, a great French singer, called "le sourire de la vitesse" [*the smile of speed*].

The scene with the six women coming forward feels like a dream sequence, removed from the reality of the film. Ann is in the back of the car, falling asleep...

I had a hard time imagining Henry's fall from grace. In the original treatment, he just became less successful over time. But I wanted it to be sudden. So I started imagining things that could go very wrong with one of his shows. It had happened to a few real-life comedians. Michael Richards became famous with the sitcom *Seinfeld*, but one night, as he was doing his stand-up show, he suddenly went into a wild racist rant, and then had to retire from stand-up. Dieudonné was a very successful French stand-up comedian, politicized on the left, who for some reason moved to the far right, and whose anti-Semitic provocations kind of killed his career. And Bill Cosby ended up being convicted and imprisoned for raping women.

But these cases, involving violence, sex or racism, were too *real* for our film; they would make Henry too obvious a villain, too early in the film. So I thought: first, he won't *do* anything terrible, he'll fantasize about something terrible, and people will hate him for that —because comedy's truth does have its limits. And then Ann too should fantasize about something terrible, in relation to him. He has visions of her, dying again and again on stage, and plays with the idea of killing her. And she dreams of him being accused of having abused women.

Can you talk about why you wanted to include the #MeToo culture into *Annette*?

I didn't particularly want to, and #MeToo hadn't happened yet when we imagined the film. But it was coming up. More and more women were coming forward.

A huge majority of films are made by guys. More women filmmakers have appeared since I started making films, but it's still mostly guys, white guys. And quite often, these films show a white male character, another white guy, who acts like a monster, but whom the film forgives. "Man, cinema forgives you everything".

But hopefully there will be more and more filmmakers who are not white guys, and what cinema forgives or doesn't forgive will unsettle us in new ways.

Were you thinking of bad male behavior and how it's connected or not connected to artistic output in the creation of Henry's character?

Yes, but it's something I've always thought about. Bad men, bad fathers, and those male artists who were terrible people but inspired me so much. Starting, when I was young, with the great French novelist Céline, who became mostly known for his anti-Semitic lampoons during the Nazi occupation of France.

Do you think it's too much to expect from artists to also be good people?

Not too much, but it's not the right expectation. There are of course great artists who seem to have been beautiful human beings, like Beckett, or Bram van Velde. As far as we know, they suffered, but didn't make others suffer. And their beauty imbues their work. But I'm not sure there are many such artists. Was Chaplin a good person? Or Patricia Highsmith, whom I like a lot? The two most gifted comedians of our time, in my mind, are Dieudonné and Louis C.K. One is a fascist lunatic, and the other apparently forced women to watch him masturbate.

Annette only turns into a real girl in the end, when she's totally alone.

That's the *Pinocchio* side of the film —and the reason why I added that last scene in prison. And it's often the truth: it's when kids get rid of the adults that truth comes out. That's what I experienced. And that's why I changed my name when I was 13. I don't want my daughter to ever push me away, but that's how it happens. Annette appears and says to her father: "Yes, I have changed, and it's over. Now you have no one to love."

That's a very shocking scene because she's this innocent little girl, and although she's been through a lot, you don't expect that she has necessarily processed all of it. And yet, she's so determined to break her bond with her father who is her last relative. That must have been very difficult to write and to shoot.

Very. But films with certainties are not interesting. Films become alive when you spill your doubts and fears into them. When you confront what seems impossible, unimaginable to you. Like your daughter turning against you.

I wanted to ask about this motif of the orphan, which you've talked about before. This sort of childhood wish fulfillment: a dream of waking up in a world where you're all by yourself, a sort of scary but also totally freeing dream, which you have compared to the experience of being in a film theater. Annette literally becomes an orphan at the end.

I feel very close to her. It's like in *The Night of the Hunter*, but she has no big brother and no Lillian Gish to protect her. She's really left all alone with that man-father.

Cinema is for the orphan in us. I remember the experience, when I first came to Paris, of discovering films, alone in the dark, especially silent films. It had these same elements of freedom and dread. To sit in the dark, surrounded by all these people you don't know, and to be facing something much bigger than yourself, something that is not your family... It's very powerful.

I heard you were alone when you were quite young. Fassbinder once said "I was left alone to grow like a flower," because was also raised without much oversight from his parents.

I think it's a blessing, for certain children, to be left alone when there is too much chaos around. They benefit from tragedy, family tragedies, by being left alone. The chaos allows them to invent or reinvent themselves.

One last question: how did you find the little girl who plays Annette in the prison scene?

I was alarmed I would never find her, find such a young girl who could confront Adam and say those words —sing them actually. But Carmen Cuba, our casting director, found her. Little Devyn [McDowell]

had just turned five years old. Among all the girls we had seen in France, England, and America, she was the youngest, the one with the shortest attention span, and the most unpredictable. But she was the one I wanted to film.

The prison scene was shot at the very end. So the whole adventure ended as it had started: by worrying about whether Annette would live up to the film's aspirations. Except she was now a flesh and bone Annette, not our puppet Annette. I thought: "Shit, the fate of our whole film is now in the hands of this little girl." But it was only fair: she and the puppet had the title role after all. And as Henry says: "Annette is a miracle. Miracles do exist."

About Leos Carax

Visionary and enigmatic, Leos Carax has authored some of the most beautiful moments of French cinema in the last 35 years, with a filmography that has never ceased to display his mastery of directing. A poetic genius with an overflowing imagination, "l'enfant terrible" of French cinema has consistently transcended filmic codes and genres to create a world full of visions and ghosts.

At the mere age of 24, Carax began a trilogy from which urban and nocturnal beauty emanated in a magical Paris. Shot in black-and-white, *Boy Meets Girl* (1984) paid tribute to silent films, to Cocteau's universe and Godard's cinema.

With *Bad Blood (Mauvais Sang)* (1986), an ode to rhythm and love, starring Denis Lavant, Juliette Binoche and Michel Piccoli, Carax establishes his hard-hitting emotional style and with it, finds his first international success. Dominated by an assertive aesthetic universe and lyricism, this expressionist thriller offers a one-of-a-kind visual experience.

In 1991, the director embarked on a most ambitious project, *The Lovers on the Bridge (Les Amants du Pont-Neuf)*. Recreating an entire Parisian neighborhood and a 3-year-long shooting offered to this ode to passionate love a legendary place in French cinema.

After 8 years of silence, *Pola X* (1999) marked Carax's return to the Festival de Cannes' Competition. Following this adaptation of Melville's "Pierre, or, The Ambiguities" he returned to the Croisette with *Merde*, a short film part of a collective fantasy in three movements, *Tokyo!*, co-directed by Michel Gondry and Bong Joon-ho and presented at Un Certain Regard in 2008.

Finally, in 2012, Leos Carax returned in Competition in Cannes with *Holy Motors*, a meandering filmic experience that puts magic in reality and everyday life in fantasy. Another declaration of love for cinema, with Edith Scob, escaped from Georges Franju's *Eyes Without a Face*.

Filmography

1984 : Boy Meets Girl

1986 : Mauvais Sang

1991 : Les Amants du Pont-Neuf

1999 : Pola X

2012 : Holly Motors

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARION COTILLARD (ANN)

How much did you like Leos Carax's films before you came on board for the *Annette* adventure?

I'm not sure how old I was exactly when I saw *Lovers on the Bridge* for the first time, but I know I already wanted to be an actress. I'd loved the film, its gracefulness, its poetry - I was overwhelmed. But then again, there was Juliette Binoche whose character, performance, and radiance swept me off my feet at the time. I fell in love with Leos Carax's artistry, and I saw all of his films over time, up until his latest, *Holy Motors*, which I think is a masterpiece.

Annette's script was a very peculiar affair, halfway between a traditional narrative and an opera libretto, accompanied by Sparks' songs. How did you react when you first read it?

When I received the script, I already knew the film was entirely sung, and the narrative was only made up of songs. I was already sold, as it were. I felt so lucky to be able to lay my hands on this piece. And

then I was totally won over as I read it - I related both to the uplifting element of the operatic musical and the profound darkness of what the film is about.

Did you still hesitate in any way before embarking on the project?

I immediately wanted to work with Leos, but I wasn't sure I could bring all that the character required. Leos is a rare filmmaker and makes very few films. It necessarily adds to the pressure, to the fear of not being able to match up to him as an artist. So I did hesitate a little. I asked my singing teacher if I could in no time learn how to live up to what was expected of me, even though I obviously couldn't possibly become an opera singer in just a few weeks. We knew from the outset that we had to come up with a method for the opera singing part - and blend my voice with that of a professional singer. Still, it was a huge challenge. My teacher told me it'd be difficult, it'd take a lot of work, but that we could be confident. I needed his blessing to say "Yes."

How familiar were you with Sparks' music before working on this project? How does it inspire you?

I wasn't familiar with their music at all but as a teenager, I just loved Rita Mitsouko's "Singing in the Shower" and I found out later it was written by Sparks. Then I met with them for this project - and I was overwhelmed by their commitment to and faith in the film. Sparks has always been involved in the project, from its early days. There's something liberating when you actually get down to work, for artists who have been a part of this project for so long, who fought to bring it to completion. The film was getting made, and they knew it, and we all shared in the joy of working all together for the benefit of a special project and of special artists.

How would you define the music they wrote for the film?

I think it's an opera, even though all the songs are not operatic. With the themes they address, as well as their lyrical, flamboyant compositions, *Annette* very much feels like an opera, albeit modernized, naturally.

When you began talking with Leos Carax, what did he tell you about your character? What was his take on the role? Did he give you any specific directions about it?

When we first met, we didn't talk so much about the character or his vision of the film. There's something both profoundly mysterious and very down-to-earth about him. We quickly began talking about the work, the technique, the singing, the music. Later on, he sent me a lot of references about Ann that helped me get a better grip on the character. He'd send me videos of interviews with Romy Schneider, whose combination of strength and gentleness he related to, and he paid close attention to the costumes I'd wear, to Ann's figure, to her color palette. I saw Ann being fleshed out as we were getting the work done.

***Annette* follows Ann, a famous opera singer, who's in a relationship with Henry, a stand-up comedian who gradually loses his mind as his career suddenly collapses. You could think it's a film about breakups, in more than one respect. What do you think the film has to say about married life?**

What struck me most about the film is what it has to say about the influence of ego on marital life - how ego can powerfully fuel self-realization and, at the same time, totally alienate you from yourself; how the need for acknowledgment - this disease - can take over everything else and turn you into a monster able to manipulate those that are closest to you. Ann and Henry are both very exposed, and when two people feel this need for acknowledgment and become that famous, there's bound to be a kind of vague competition eating away at the couple, that you don't know how to deal with. The film's statement on this inner sickness that estranges you from your loved ones and may even bring you to destruction is very powerful.

The film's also about a father's journey toward his child - a man who tries to reconnect with fatherhood. But the film goes about it in a Carax-like fashion, in a totally dreamlike way, using major opera figures, ghosts, puppets, dreams, and so on. How much did you relate to Leos Carax's way of transforming reality and autobiographical material?

That's what makes him so special. He has a kind of poetry that allows him to depict slightly supernatural things, but that touches on pure, honest, profound emotions that humans experience and that speak to the human condition, as much in its beauty as its darkness. Leos's films are very much like him. There actually is true darkness about him, but it's made up for by his unwavering love

for all things farcical and ridiculous. He's, I think, the filmmaker that has best glorified the ridiculous, that has made it beautiful. I didn't have any preconceived ideas about him before I met him, but I couldn't help finding him a bit daunting - he is the artist whom I found was so inspiring when I was younger and who was such a sensation. But when I met him, the first thing that struck me was his sense of humor. Leos is like a child making jokes. I'd never have assumed as much about him. Not one day went by on set without him smiling, looking to crack a joke, to be funny. He's very vibrant.

Leos Carax is best known for being a painstaking filmmaker on set and for addressing the actors almost by whispering into their ears. Did you experience that yourself?

He's both very specific on set and very flamboyant. He's totally in love with his job, with the set, with the filmmaking process, the actors, and he's highly respectful - as an actor, it's wonderful to feel watched and cared for by an artist such as him. What struck me on set is how much he keeps track of every detail - how well a piece of clothing fits, how you convey what you intend to portray and so forth. He was so focused, and all the more so as the shoot was particularly challenging because Leos was intent on having all the songs performed live. On most traditional musicals, you record your songs during preproduction and then you lip-sync on set. But on this project, Leos wanted everything to be live. It made the shoot even more challenging - we'd be singing in very awkward positions, like backstroking or faking cunnilingus, which are very challenging postures that technically affect your singing. But this is the kind of effect Leos was looking for - he wanted voices to be altered, thwarted by reality.

Tell us about your approach to singing and music, precisely. How did you work with the singer Catherine Trottmann, whose voice was blended with yours for the opera singing part?

We knew from the start that I couldn't take on the opera singing all by myself. It's just impossible to reach a soprano's vibrato in barely three months of training. So we decided to blend my voice with that of a professional singer, but we only found her after we wrapped the shoot, which made things even more difficult. I had a wonderful time with Catherine Trottman as I almost found myself in the position of a film director - I'd give her directions on how to adjust her voice, on the songs' meaning etc. It was both complicated to pass on part of my performance to someone else and extremely inspiring.

You'd never acted opposite Adam Driver before. In the film, his strength and physicality come across as impressive - he's a dark antihero. What was it like working with him? How did you put up with the violence affecting your dynamic?

Adam was attached to the project from the very beginning, and he embraced it with unwavering faith in it. We met for the first time in New York, in a recording studio, in the middle of a singing session. He's an amazing actor, and we felt from the get-go that we belonged to the same team, both working for a special filmmaker. Leos took us by the hand and pulled us into his project. The first song we both performed on that day was "We Love Each Other So Much," which is the film's ultimate declaration of love. It's always a bit weird and daunting to start a working relationship with this kind of sentimental outpouring, but Adam and I quickly bonded through laughter. We're like big kids on a shoot. Humor somehow helped us overcome whatever obstacles came our way. We had a wonderful dynamic on this film, we managed to portray these very dark, destructive characters while remaining light-hearted. That's also key to Leos's working method.

ADAM DRIVER (HENRY MC HENRY)

How did you originally get involved with Annette?

Leos reached out to me about it around 7 years ago now. And that was kind of it.

Where and when did you first read the script and what was your initial reaction to it?

I was excited by it.

What was it about the project that made want to be a part of it, not only as an actor but as a producer?

That it was Leos. That it was a musical the Sparks wrote. There were all these big sequences that required rehearsal, big set pieces, a lot of moving parts. All of it sounded like a challenge but that the result could be singular.

What was it about Leos Carax's previous work that made you interested in collaborating with him?

Were there any films of his that you particularly liked or were inspired by? The actors seemed to have such freedom in them. And the shots are incredible. They ask a lot of the people making them. Hard to pick a specific one. There are moments and sequences in all of them that are unforgettable.

What was Leos' directing style like on set?

Hard to summarize but from my perspective he's living every moment along with his actors and crew; so he's not leading with a bullhorn, it's more from a place of focus. He doesn't miss a detail. He's great at balancing moments of complete spontaneity within heavy choreography. He's hilarious. He's one of the great directors of all time.

Much of the dialogue is sung. What did you do to prepare for the musical aspect of the role? What was the rehearsal process like?

As far as the music was concerned, I met with Michael Rafter, who I had worked with on *Marriage Story*. I drilled the songs with him for months. The Sparks and Leos were very clear with what sound they were going for and that the storytelling was the priority. We pre-recorded everything as a back-up but we sung everything live as well. I don't know what percentage made it in the movie but I think the majority.

This is your first time producing a feature film, how would you define your role as producer and what was that experience like?

I thought of my role as producer as being paramount to the production. It forces you to think technically while trying to do something abstract. Which is nice. It feels like everyone else on set has to do that so I don't know why actors are exempt.

SIMON HELBERG (THE CONDUCTOR)

« Being on Leos's set felt like going to church - quiet and profound. He is a wildly brilliant visionary man and it was one of the great joys of my life to be a part of that vision.

My character, The Conductor, starts off as an accompanist, eager for attention and acclaim, and above all, the love of Ann. He is a bleeding heart romantic with a boyish purity and an integrity that is tested by the allure of fame and a desire to forge a connection with Ann's daughter, Annette. »

A NOTE FROM CINEMATOGRAPHER CAROLINE CHAMPETIER

Joy of Manufacturing

The two years we spent making *Annette* have been an experience we would wish for any film crew member.

First of all, spending all that time on songs lifted us a little above the ground.

And the technical challenge of each sequence required so much collaboration and precision that our mutual dependence on each other created a group around a leader, who was never domineering, but often funny with an amazingly determined imagination.

We tried out everything, we experimented—this Saint Thomas of a man only believed what he saw... It was our job to invent a wall of waves, a moonlit beach, a ghost, a child from birth to six years old, a smoke cube, a real forest behind the iron curtain of a theater, a crazy stadium ...

In the suburbs where we were preparing the film, each department had its own workshop. There, we had built a Black Maria* entirely made up of black fabric in which we filmed the evidence of our progress. When "it worked," a deep joy took hold of us.

Irresistibly, we had gone from Lumière to Méliès.

Caroline Champetier

**Nickname given by Thomas Edison's employees to the first studio in the history of cinema in West Orange, New Jersey.*

AN INTERVIEW WITH RON MAEL and RUSSELL MAEL

ABOUT SPARKS

The career of the ground-breaking pop pioneers Sparks – brothers Ron and Russell Mael - is an immaculate lesson in how to stay consistently interesting for fifty years. Internationally acclaimed, Sparks have released 25 creatively bold albums since their debut in 1972. Moving to London from their native Los Angeles in 1974, Sparks released their influential album *Kimono My House*, which quickly became a worldwide phenomenon, setting the tone for the band's creative output to follow. Since that time, the musically vital pop pioneers have created a unique legacy both on record and in live performances.

The evergreen masters of the musical vignette, Sparks show no loss of appetite for their singular sonic adventures. Replicating the critical and commercial success of their 2017 album *Hippopotamus* – which featured on countless 'Album of the Year' lists – the band's latest album *A Steady Drip, Drip, Drip*, released in 2020 to global acclaim, became their second UK top 10 album since 1974, when *Kimono My House* and *Propaganda* reached number 4 and 9 respectively. In March 2021 the band revealed they had started work on their 26th studio album, currently due for release in 2022 to coincide with their live tour.

Now entering their sixth decade, 2021 will see the eagerly awaited premiere of the movie musical *Annette*. With original story, music and lyrics by Sparks, *Annette* stars Adam Driver, Marion Cotillard and Simon Helberg and is the first English-language film from groundbreaking French director Leos Carax (*Holy Motors*, *Pola X*). The band's singular career is explored and celebrated in *The Sparks Brothers*, the eagerly-anticipated feature-length film by *Shaun Of The Dead*/*Baby Driver* director Edgar Wright which saw its premiere at the Sundance Film Festival and will be released in cinemas this summer.

www.allsparks.com

How was the Annette project born?

In 2009 we had been approached by the Swedish National Radio to create a musical radio drama with the only stipulation being that it had to incorporate something with a Swedish element within it. We thus came up with the idea for 'The Seduction of Ingmar Bergman', a musical fantasy about what might have happened had Bergman been lured to Hollywood for financial gains and more notoriety than in his Swedish homeland, but at the potential risk of selling his creative soul to the Hollywood machine. The success of this project helped us realize that we could push ourselves in other musical forms than just 3-minute pop songs that we had been doing for many decades in our band Sparks.

In 2011 we once again had the urge to challenge ourselves with another narrative project. Hence, the birth of our musical, *Annette*. Initially, we conceived *Annette* as another Sparks album. Yet this time it would be a narrative story that would consist of three main characters, a small enough ensemble that would allow us to also present the 'opera' live on tour as Sparks. The two of us would portray the two of the main characters, Henry McHenry and the Conductor. We would then add a female to our touring outfit to play the role of Ann.

The music, story and album were finished and ready to go. However, here's where the story takes a huge detour. We went to the Cannes Film Festival in 2013 and were introduced to Leos Carax who had used one of Sparks' songs, "How Are You Getting Home," in his then latest film 'Holy Motors.'

We felt a real kinship with Leos after our meeting. When we returned to LA after Cannes, we thought we should send Leos 'Annette', not expecting anything other than to show him what Sparks was currently up to. And lo and behold, he said he really liked the project and would like to consider it as

his next project. After several weeks of reflection, Leos got back to us saying he'd really like to direct 'Annette' as his next movie. We were happily surprised and elated at his reaction.

We were fans of Leos' films, and to now realize that he would be directing a film of ours was beyond our dreams.

How did the collaboration with the director Leos Carax go? A few words on the creative process...

So, for the next seven years, we met Leos in both Paris and Los Angeles and set out to refine some of the story elements and music. It was a long process, but both Leos and our motivation were so strong to make 'Annette' happen that we let nothing get in the way of our trans-Atlantic work schedule. When our schedules didn't allow for in-person meetings, we'd send files back and forth with our latest updates. And I think that once Leos had presented the project to Adam Driver and he responded so favorably, we all felt that much closer to knowing this would be a great movie.

What type of music did you aim at creating?

We firmly believe that there are fresh approaches to how a musical can be done. We always wanted to approach Annette with a naturalistic tone. Movements could be stylized at times but wouldn't be done with traditional musical dance choreography. This would be a drama, yet the characters would sing in a more conversational feel. We were on the same wavelength as Leos.

How did the recording go?

Initially, all the recordings were done by ourselves in LA. Russell portrayed the character of Henry McHenry, while Ron did the character of the Conductor/Accompanist. Our initial recordings featured an opera singer from LA in the role of Ann. When she wasn't available for a session, Russell sang her parts too. We have years of different versions of the pieces, sometimes with either Ron or Russell doing different characters.

Once Adam signed on to do the role of Henry, we met with him in LA to discuss the tone of the singing. Again, we were on the same page as far as the style of the singing for the movie.

And, what a complete thrill to finally hear Adam do the parts that Russell had sung for years and years. It was everything and more than we had hoped for. We believe Leos feels the same.

And Marion Cotillard equally brought something fresh and exciting to the character Ann.

Later in the process Simon Helberg was brought in for the role that Ron had initially sang, the Conductor/Accompanist. He's also done a wonderful job of bringing the character to life. And of course, Leos took the project to another level with his artistic vision.

And the usual question: which role does music play in a film according to you?

We believe that there are many great film composers today. However, the craft of creating music and story for a movie musical requires using a different side of the brain than creating for a score. The characters live and breathe through the sensibility, tone, and lyrics of the music. In Annette, we set out to have virtually all the dialogue sung. It was a huge challenge, but one we are extremely proud of.

ABOUT THE FILM SOUNDTRACK BY SPARKS

Yet another reminder of their everlasting influence and innovation, the story of *Annette*, originally intended to be a Sparks studio album, was developed with director Leos Carax after a meeting at the Cannes Film Festival in 2013. The final soundtrack collection features lyrics co-written by Sparks and Leos Carax, performed by Sparks and the cast of *Annette* and produced by Sparks.

Of the collaboration, **SPARKS** say, "Initially, we conceived *Annette* as another Sparks album. Yet this time it would be a narrative story that would consist of three main characters, a small enough ensemble that would allow us to also present the 'opera' live on tour... The music, story and album were finished and ready to go, which is where the story takes a huge detour. After meeting Leos at Cannes, we felt a real kinship, so we thought we would send him *Annette*, not expecting anything other than to show him what Sparks was currently up to. And lo and behold, he said he really liked the album and would like to consider it as his next project. We were happily surprised and elated at his reaction. As fans of Leos' films, to now realize that he would be directing a film of ours was beyond our dreams."

Annette director **LEOS CARAX** adds, “I discovered Sparks when I was about 14 – I stole a copy of *Propaganda* from an underground shop at La Défense because I liked the cover. Not long after that I saw them live at the Olympia in Paris. *Propaganda* and their next album, *Indiscreet*, have been part of my life ever since. Their tracks are among the most joyous songs I know (although they’re poignant too, in places). For me, Sparks’ music is like a childhood home, but one free of ghosts. Without them, I don’t think I’d ever have done something I’d dreamt of doing ever since I first started out in cinema: making a ‘film in music.’”

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SPARKS APPROVED IMAGES (CREDIT ANNA WEBBER): [DOWNLOAD](#)

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ARTISTIC LIST

Henry Mc Henry
Ann
The Conductor
Annette
Sparks
Sparks

Adam Driver
Marion Cotillard
Simon Helberg
Devyn Mc Dowell
Russell Mael
Ron Mael

FULL BILLING BLOCK

CG CINÉMA INTERNATIONAL PRESENTS
A CG CINÉMA INTERNATIONAL AND TRIBUS P FILMS INTERNATIONAL PRODUCTION

Adam Driver

Marion Cotillard

and Simon Helberg

ANNETTE

a film by Leos Carax

Original story and music by SPARKS
Lyrics by Ron Mael, Russell Mael, & LC

Devyn Mc Dowell with the participation of Angèle

Original story by Ron Mael and Russell Mael - Cinematography Caroline Champetier, afc - Editing Nelly Quettier - Annette's Puppet created by Estelle Charlier and Romuald Collinet - Music Supervision Pierre-Marie Dru - Additional Arrangements and Orchestrations Clément Ducol - Executive Music Producers Pierre-Marie Dru & Marius De Vries – Music Directors Clément Ducol & Fiora Cutler - Sound Erwan Kerzanet, Katia Boutin, Maxence Dussere, Paul Heymans, Thomas Gauder - Production design Florian Sanson - Costumes Pascaline Chavanne - Make-up and hair Bernard Floch - Line producer Tatiana Bouchain - Post-production supervisor Eugénie Deplus - Director's assistants Michael Pierrard, Amandine Escoffier, Julie Gouet, Juliette Picollot - a film produced by Charles Gillibert, p.g.a, Paul-Dominique Vacharasinthu, Adam Driver - coproduced by Fabian Gasmia, Geneviève Lemal, Benoît Roland, Arlette Zylberberg, Kenzo Horikoshi, Julio Chavezmontes, Consuelo Frauenfelder, Grégoire Melin – a CG Cinéma International - Tribus P Films International - ARTE France Cinéma - THEO FILMS - UGC - DETAiLFILM - Scope Pictures - Wrong Men - RTBF (Télévision belge) - EUROSPACE - PIANO - Garidi Films coproduction - with the participation of Arte France - ZDF / ARTE - Canal + - Ciné + - Proximus - VOO & Be TV - with the support of Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée - EURIMAGES - SACEM - Film- und Medienstiftung NRW - FFA Filmförderungsanstalt - Tax Shelter du Gouvernement fédéral belge via Scope Invest - Screen Flanders an initiative of Flanders Innovation & Entrepreneurship (VLAIO) - Wallimage (La Wallonie) - Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles - LVT, Asur, Interceramic & Monex via EFICINE - Agency for Cultural Affairs, Government of Japan - in association with Kinology - Indéfilms 8 - Cofinova 16 - Palatine Etoile 17 - Cinémage 14 - Cineaxe - Sofitvcine 7 - SG Image 2018 - Talipot Studio – International sales: Kinology - US Distribution: Amazon Studios – French Distribution: UGC

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CANNES OFFICIAL TEXTS:

Nine years after the remarkable *Holy Motors*, presented in Competition, Leos Carax will unveil in Cannes his new feature, a film eagerly awaited by cinephiles around the world. *Annette*, Carax's first film in English, will open the Cannes 74th International Film Festival on Tuesday, July 6th.

"Every Leos Carax film is an event. And this one delivers on its promises! Annette is the gift that lovers of cinema, music and culture were hoping for, one that we have been yearning for during the past year. We couldn't have dreamed of a more beautiful reunion with cinema and the silver screen, in this Palais des Festivals where films reveal all of their splendor. Carax's cinema is an expression of these powerful gestures and mysterious alchemies that makes the secret of cinema's modernity and eternity."

Pierre Lescure & Thierry Frémaux

**IT'S THE END, SO WE BID YOU GOODNIGHT
SAFE JOURNEY HOME, WATCH OUT FOR STRANGERS
IF YOU LIKED WHAT YOU SAW - TELL A FRIEND
IF YOU'VE GOT NO FRIENDS,
THEN TELL A STRANGER - TONIGHT
GOOD NIGHT, ONE AND ALL
GOOD NIGHT, ONE AND ALL
GOOD NIGHT,
ONE AND ALL**