

Review #88

Les Petites du Quai aux Fleurs (1944)

Sparkling, touching comedy brilliantly photographed by Alekan

While the story in itself is hardly compelling or especially original, the **dialogue by Marcel Achard sparkles and bristles with wit**, and the performances are uniformly superb from a terrific cast : **Louis Jourdan**, the most handsome actor of his generation — who was more famous in America than in his native country ; **Bernard Blier**, not really handsome but witty and gentle-hearted ; **Gérard Philippe** in his film debut ; **Odette Joyeux**, who always shone in this kind of romantic comedy, as an ingenue — although she was actually already 26 and an established name. But what really makes the film stand out is **Henri Alekan's extraordinarily beautiful, masterful cinematography**. Even at that relatively

early stage of his long career (which included Wenders' *Wings of Desire*), Alekan creates *seductive image after seductive image*, with meticulous attention to detail in **high-contrast lighting and composition**. An absolute joy to watch — happily, the DVD was made from an excellent print, and could serve as a model for any aspiring cinematographer. *Les Petites du Quai aux Fleurs* is also interesting for the way in which it slyly alludes to its own period, the German Occupation of France, by placing here and there in the background posters for various other films from the period, notably **Marcel L'Herbier's** *La Comédie du Bonheur* — also starring Louis Jourdan.



SYNOPSIS

This is a bittersweet comedy by **Marc Allégret** then in his best period – from *Gribouille* (1937) to *Blanche Fury* (1947). An old second-hand bookseller (**André Lefaur**) on the banks of the Seine, the ‘*Quai aux Fleurs*’, has got four gorgeous daughters ; several young men hover round them. Unfortunately for Rosine (**Odette Joyeux**), she is **in love with her sister's fiancé (Louis Jourdan)** and feels suicidal. A good doctor comes to her rescue (**Bernard Blier**). Then begins a story made of light-hearted gallantries, sometimes verging on full-blown comedy (especially the hilarious scene when Bernard Blier is stuck in a medieval armour), sometimes verging on tragic (but the sensitivity and beauty of the filming exclude overt sentimentality). *Summing-up* : this is the story of a young girl who learns **how it is painful growing up**.

Best scene : a murder party, like **Agatha Christie** loved them, in which the player who draws the ace of spade is the criminal, and the one who draws the ace of hearts is the policeman. Awesome ! Some kind of ‘*real*’ crime is committed during the game (*see picture*) but I’m not telling you what ! Very enjoyable ! +++