

NOLITA and LES FILMS DU MONSIEUR
present

Ludivine Sagnier José Garcia Jean-Paul Rouve

LOLA ET SES FRERES (LOLA AND HER BROTHERS)

A film by Jean-Paul Rouve

Ramzy Bédia and Pauline Clément from La Comédie Française
Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu Franck Bruneau Jacques Boudet
Screenplay by David Foenkinos and Jean-Paul Rouve

Running time: 105 minutes

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SYNOPSIS

Lola (Ludivine Sagnier) has two brothers: Benoit (Jean-Paul Rouve), who is getting married for the third time, and Pierre (José Garcia), who shows up late for the wedding. Excuses, reproaches, arguments, misunderstandings... beneath it all, they're just doing their best to live their own lives. Benoit is about to become a father, but he's not ready yet. Lola meets Zoher (Ramzy Bedia) while she's still going through her divorce. Pierre's professional problems take a turn for the worse. Though everything in their lives seems to be pulling them apart, the three of them stick together - an inseparable trio.

CAST

Ludivine Sagnier	Lola
José Garcia	Pierre
Jean-Paul Rouve	Benoit
Ramzy Bedia	Zoher
Pauline Clément	Sarah

CREW

Director: Jean-Paul Rouve
Head production Manager : Luc Martinage
Production Manager: Annick Aucante
1st Assistant Director: Leonard Vindry
Script: Margot Seban
Director of Photography: Christophe Offenstein
Sound Engineer: Marc-Antoine Beldent
Editor: Jean-Christophe Bouzy
Music: Alexis Rault
Casting Director: Gigi Akoka
Production Design: Laurent Ott
Costume Designer: Carine Sarfati

Produced by: Nolita Cinema and Les Films du Monsieur

Delegated Producers: Romain Rousseau, Maxime Delauney
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INTERVIEW WITH JEAN-PAUL ROUVE

"Lola and Her Brothers" is the fourth film you have directed and the second film written with David Foenkinos, after "Memories". Was it that first collaboration that made you want to work with him again?

Absolutely. We got along together wonderfully on "Memories", an adaptation of his novel that we worked on together. We didn't know each other before that, but we have the same sense of humor, the same influences and interests. It was a real stroke of luck for me to find a screenwriter like him to cowrite with.

"Memories" was an adaptation. "Lola and Her Brothers" is an original screenplay. Where did the original idea come from?

Just after "Souvenirs" was released, David and I left to spend a few days in Brussels together. We didn't want to be in Paris, or in a sunny vacation spot, because to write about life, you have to be right in the thick of it. If you're at a hotel on the beach, it's not the same at all! Or at least I can't work that way and neither can David. Plus, he loves writing in public transportation, so the train is great! In Belgium, we started talking about a few things we had each set aside on our own. Bits and pieces of life offered by people who we've crossed paths with, character traits of people we both know. David and I don't at all adhere to the traditional rules for writing a script: nothing is done in continuity. We just write and write, and then change and cut, and in the end, the script is nourished by scenes that no longer exist. Early on, we got started on the theme of brother-sister relationships. It's a subject that interests me. We had started to write characters and invent their lives, putting a lot of things down in detail. I think the first version of the script must have been 150 pages! At the end of the day, we realized that the main theme of the film had imposed itself naturally - we hadn't really decided anything at all. A little like those scratch card games, where you discover how much you win as you gradually scrape off the top layer! In the end, though the script for "Lola and Her Brothers" naturally spoke about the relationships between two brothers and a sister, it was above all about how children - which Pierre has, Lola wants and Benoit doesn't really - contribute or don't contribute to their parents, and about the bonds between generations.

Did the subject relate to you personally - to your own relationships with your brothers and sisters?

No, I'm an only child! And it's the same with David, who has a brother but no sister. But I think that the less a story is autobiographical, the more it says about you. Autobiography can be a great path to take, but it also shackles you. We actually put some other pretty intimate things into the characters: Pierre (played by José Garcia), is a lot like my father, who ended up unemployed at the age of 50. I know a woman who can't have children, and she inspired the character of Lola (Ludivine Sagnier). Sara, my wife in the film, is directly inspired by a woman David and I both know and love. Once again, the stories we are telling are people's lives.

When we look at the films you have directed - perhaps setting aside your first one, "The Easy Way" - we realize they all deal with issues of heritage, family and intergenerational relationships.

Yes, it's obvious I'm preoccupied by that! Actually, David was the one who thought of me for adapting "Memories" into a film. He had seen my second film, "Quand je serai petit", and wanted to meet me because he thought my movies had a lot in common with his writing. When I read "Memories", I found the same situations in it that you see in "Quand je serai petit". You know, those moments I love in life, when nothing is really happening but you get to the essential, like discussions in an outdoor café. What we leave behind, the passing of time, showing that everyone's just trying to do their best. I love observing human beings from that point of view! David and I both really love writing about characters who lie. But hold on: I'm talking about little white lies, the ones we all tell from day to day. It's a fascinating subject, and I don't think it will ever go out of style in films. I try to imagine stories that will still be relevant in 50 years, even if no one will ever be watching my films anymore at that point! Human relationships - love, friendship, work and family - that's a constant for as long as we exist on Earth. It's a real delight to write that way, especially in the dialogue, since David and I use a particular method. As an actor, I act out the situations and we note them down, to make them real. Later, when we're shooting, I listen to the lines and I can tell if they ring true. If they don't, I cut them out, which is often the case for lines that seem important on paper! But it's like life: we rarely say the essential things. Instead, we beat around the bush, we say one thing but mean another, we repeat ourselves, we remain silent. That's what a real discussion is like.

"Lola and Her Brothers" takes on some pretty tough themes, like unemployment, mourning and solitude, but you add in little doses of surrealistic moments, such as the character of the old man in the cemetery, which punctuate the story.

Now that's the stamp of David Foenkinos! It's a form of poetry and I really like it. He often comes up with ideas for characters who are a bit "marginal" but still active in life, like the gas station attendant in "Memories". I think of them like points of reference, enchanted interludes, kind of like everyday philosophers. We often treat those characters with a dash of humor, because that makes them realistic.

Let's talk about your actors, beginning with Ludivine Sagnier, who plays Lola.

I probably imagined almost every French actress between the age of 30 and 40 for that role! Lola is a very complicated, complex character: she suffocates from her brothers' oppression, but she is also their big sister, like a mother to them. So I was looking for an actress with audacity, substance and personality, but who could also be fragile and on the edge. I have to say, all the actresses I met agreed to do screen tests. I wanted to be able to feel the different layers of Lola on screen. And for me, Ludivine had that in her. A fragile, sweet side and a strong personality. The femininity of a woman as well as a tomboy side.

After that, how did you direct her on set?

You don't direct an actor. If you have to do that, you've cast the wrong person for the part! All you have to do is talk and explain, then let them act. Ludivine and the others are all experienced actors. They know what they're doing.

How did you choose José Garcia for the character of Pierre?

José came on board fairly early. He's an actor I really like. I called him up, I sent him the screenplay and he answered me two days later. After that, we met and I explained what I expected of him. I wanted him to be badly shaved, with grey hairs in his beard and the beginnings of a pot belly. Pierre is a guy who buys his clothes at the sports store, the same t-shirt in four different colors, with 501 jeans, because that's what he's always worn, even if they don't look that great on him! I warned him that he wouldn't be very charming at first, but as the film developed, he would become more and more handsome. And that's what happens: he is totally attractive! He's like one of Claude Sautet's characters. When it comes down to it, José, like me, comes from the working class we portray in the film. He understood the story we were telling. I told him from the very beginning: "Don't do a thing." We love his comedic talent and crazy characters, but here we needed him to play it completely straight and real. He knew his lines perfectly and never changed a thing, because he didn't want it to be about him. I know the role reminded him of personal issues that aren't any of my business, and he was very affected by that.

Tell us about Ramzy Bédia, in the role of Zoher, Lola's boyfriend. A man from outside the family who sees their strange relationship and is very lucid about things.

Zoher is us, he's the viewer. He is a very important character. I've never imagined an actor when writing a part, except for in this case, where Ramzy came to mind almost right away. He is a magnificent actor who only gets better with time. He is becoming more imposing, in every sense of the word. He's a lovely man. So I called him and asked him to read the script and he was totally delighted. He thought the role was great, but also, for once, his origins weren't at all an issue in the story. Later, when we began shooting, I was more vigilant with him than with anyone else. We all know how he is: the way he talks, walks and jokes around. I told him, "I want two things: be on time, and know your lines!" He never slipped up, not even once. Once in a while, I saw Ramzy in an inflection or intonation, and I would just shout out, "Zoher!" and he would redo the take. I think he was very happy that I led him in that direction.

Can you tell us what you have enjoyed about filmmaking over the course of your career as a director? Has that evolved since your first film?

Yes, of course. When I made my first film, "The Easy Way", in 2008, it was sort of like a demo reel of all the kinds of movies I like. When I started thinking about a second film, I asked myself what I'd liked most about the first one. And actually, that was a scene in the kitchen between my character Spaggiari, Goumard played by Gilles Lellouche and Julia, played by Alice Taglioni. A very simple moment, with so much left unsaid. There's nothing to it: a table, two cups and three actors. That was what I wanted to do! So after that film, which was a biopic set in the past, I naturally turned towards something more "indy", in the most radical sense. I must have needed that. And I loved that second experience, shooting "Quand je serai petit" with Benoit Poelvoorde. Then, after the scales had tipped from right to left, things came back into balance with "Memories". I think that film is even closer to who I am - a mix of life, drama and comedy. But in that case there was still a story hook, a pitch: a grandmother placed in a retirement home who disappears. Here with "Lola and Her Brothers", we started from nothing! Just moments of life to portray - without making it annoying! That's very important to me: I like accessible, enjoyable movies. But you know, it's really complicated to write a film where nothing seems to happen! The secret is to give the characters as much humanity as possible, credibility and substance. When I see a film, I

love to feel close to the characters and understand why they make one choice or another, whether or not I agree with them. I also really like people who change their minds or do the opposite of what they say. Life is like that.

So much so, that despite all the character faults of Lola, Pierre, Benoit and the others in your film, all their lies, laziness and egotism, you manage to make us love them anyway! They're redeemable.

Yes, of course. Human beings, with a few incredible exceptions, are fundamentally redeemable. The principle of good guys and bad guys in movies doesn't reflect the reality of life. Their duality inspires affection and empathy. Take my wife in the film, wonderfully played by Pauline Clément of the Comédie Française, a character who was very difficult to cast. The viewer wonders if she is a complete idiot, if she has hidden kindness, if she is truly mean or totally borderline. But when it comes down to it, we don't hold anything against Sarah. That's bizarre, isn't it? Well that's what I really like! I love those kinds of unlikely reactions to people.

We should also point out something all four of your films have in common: the extreme care taken with the lighting, thanks to the work of Christophe Offenstein.

He is an extraordinary director of photography. We've known each other since the days of "Julie Lescaut". I played a police sergeant and he was a gaffer on the series. That was 25 years ago. We've been friends ever since. We know each other by heart and today I couldn't do a film without him. Christophe works fast. He has an incredible team. He is also fabulous at framing shots. I almost never give him directions. He shows me the shot and very, very often, I have absolutely no comments to make.

It's true that some of your film sets, such as Benoit's optical store or Pierre's construction sites, don't have anything particularly appealing about them, but even without embellishments, they are beautiful to look at on screen.

Let me explain something very important to me: I love filming things that are real with a certain cinematographic vision. For me, framing should show what is real by taking it out of its environment. So the esthetic quality of an image comes from that reality, not from cinematic artifice. A few simple examples: you'll never see me film a café or a gas station with a vintage feeling. My location scouting is always based on real life. I sometimes see things that aren't flattering in a shot, but which really exist, like a trash can, for example. Well even a trash can, I refuse to have it taken out, because in reality, it's there! It's the same thing with the apartments my characters live in, and that's something I stole from Pialat. When he talked to his production designer and costume designer, he'd say, "Think about how much money this character makes in a month." I apply that principle: the characters in my films can't wear clothes or live in places that are above their means. For Benoit, I made sure I had very precise information about what an average optician earns. And for Lola too, who is a lawyer in the provinces, not in Paris. She makes a good living, but not enough to buy a house in town. The greatest reward I could ever have is if somebody sees one of my films 20 years from now and thinks, that's how France was back then. The French provincial upper-middle class.

INTERVIEW WITH LUDIVINE SAGNIER

How did you react when you were offered the role of Lola?

What I liked most about it was the prospect of working with Jean-Paul. We've crossed paths many times over the past few years and he seemed like a nice person. Which later turned out to be false. Just kidding! But seriously, I've always had a bit of a complex. When I was a young theater arts student, I was always in comedies, though all I dreamed of was doing drama. Later, in movies, I did a lot of dramas to prove to myself that I could, and of course, I rarely got any offers for comedies. So I was very happy they thought of me for this project!

You did screen tests for the part.

Yeah, and something really funny happened. I was there to do my scene with Jean-Paul in the role of Zoher, who was played by Ramzy Bédia in the film. I was playing Lola of course. The casting director and her assistant were there to watch. Jean-Paul warned me that he wanted to do a little improvising at the end. When the scene came to an end, he threw this huge joke at me, and I answered back, and we flew into a ping-pong match that lasted forever. I realized right then that Jean-Paul was a real craftsman of word and wit and we had a great time, up until he called "cut" and turned around to the casting director. That's when we noticed that she was fanning her assistant, who had fainted while we were playing the scene. It had been three minutes since he was out cold - and not filming anymore! Of course we hadn't noticed a thing - we were so engaged in the scene and the back and forth. That was when I really wanted to do the film. I didn't want to pass up working with a guy who could make me forget I was acting that completely.

How did you feel about Lola, the character you were going to play in the film?

It's not the role I liked so much as the story that Jean-Paul and David Foenkinos developed: a story about brothers and sisters. The film raises a lot of questions. How do we relate to our brothers and sisters? How are they handicaps to us? What do we do when we have a hard time tolerating them sometimes, how do we hold onto them when it's tough? And despite it all, we can't help loving them unconditionally. For me, it was a universal subject. As for Lola, I was touched by her because she is a young woman who is constantly struggling to stay on the lighter side of life. She never lets herself sink; in fact, she constantly tries to make things brighter. That's simple enough to say, but if you really think about it, you'll see that there aren't that many people out there who follow that ambition. Often, our dreams are connected to social success. Lola's dreams are about her personal fulfilment. She is a lawyer but her goal isn't to plead cases in the courts of Paris. No - what she wants is well-being. That's how I identified with her.

The film portrays a particular relationship between the sister and her brothers. Did that have personal significance for you?

No, because I only have one sister and she isn't at all a burden for me, but what the film talks about is something I have already noticed and observed in the people around me. I always dreamed of having brothers, and since I missed out on those relationships, I always had a lot of good buddies who were boys. I could tell that with Jean-Paul there was that kind of cat-and-mouse game. We love each other but we cut each other down all day long!

There is a double connection between Lola and her brothers: she is an oppressed little sister who they hold back in life, and at the same time, she is the pillar of the family, almost a mother to Pierre and Benoit.

Yes, and she actually realizes that when the character of Sarah, Benoit's wife - the amazing Pauline Clément! - points it out to her. I think what happens to her is the end result of a long process and a possible motherhood that's not actually right for her. I know a lot of people like that, who support their brothers and sisters and one day end up forgetting themselves and can't have kids at age 45, because they've been mothering the rest of the family and never let themselves have the right to exist as a potential mother or father.

Let's talk about your brothers in the film, beginning with Jean-Paul Rouve, who plays the character of Benoit.

Jean-Paul is a Rolls Royce! He had a tough job, because even when he was doing scenes with us, he had to think of them from a director's point of view. None of us actors ever felt like his mind was elsewhere when he was acting with us. He was always there, and really there! Jean-Paul belongs to that breed of actors who has a twinkle in his eye and a flair for mischief: he is always ready to pull out a fast one on you! What struck me was his ability to have fun all the time when he was responsible for getting the film made. He never lost the joy of what he does - like a kid. As an acting partner, he was also always on the look out for that little detail that could improve a scene. It could be intimidating sometimes. Believe me, when you're on the set with Jean-Paul, José and Ramzy, you've got to find a way to stand up to those three comedy giants! Since I don't really have the funniest role either, it was difficult to hold my own, but they were all very kind, and I felt like they were constantly raising the bar, pushing me to do the best I could do all the time. Going to work every day with those three guys was really a pleasure.

How would you describe Jean-Paul Rouve as a director?

His filmmaking style was overwhelming to me. He is incredibly generous. Sometimes, in a more difficult scene, he would come up to me on all fours and whisper things that were touching or moving, or at other times, between two takes, he would come by and give me three little kisses on my temple without saying a word. I could shoot ten films with Jean-Paul and never get bored. He knows how to make very, very strong connections with his actors. I'm really proud to have met him.

José Garcia plays Pierre, in a more serious role than usual.

We all know how talented he is in wacky comedies, but in this case I found him incredibly moving. He gives a magnificent, masterful performance. He is profound, vulnerable and subtle. We've already seen him in dramas like "The Ax" or "Whatever", but here in "Lola and Her Brothers" he manages to play a shade softer. He succeeds in polymorphically adapting all the time to the changing tone of the film. It's really moving to me.

Ramzy Bédia plays the role of your fiancé Zoher, also in a style that's pretty different from what he usually does.

To the point that it makes me think he screwed up his entire career! He is so talented in this more serious type of role that he never should have done comedy. Like a sort of insecure Mastroianni, bursting with charm and so moving. I'd already noticed his sensitive, vulnerable side in the film "Hibou", but here I also saw a sweetness, a tenderness that I

hadn't recognized in him as a viewer. I'm convinced that he is at the dawn of a new direction in his path as an actor. When you see him in trailers on TV, you imagine someone bizarre and scatterbrained, but in the work we did together on our scenes, I was blown away by his concentration and the depth of his thoughts about what was at stake for our characters. Thoughts of an author, actually - which he happens to be as well. More generally, I feel that way about Ramzy, José and Jean-Paul, all three of them. The light touch we admire them for is the result of long, mature reflection and admirable, serious work. Those three boys are really hard workers and they wouldn't be where they are now without that - it's only normal!

INTERVIEW WITH JOSE GARCIA

When we consider your character in "Lola and Her Brothers", it's striking how marvelous you are in that type of role - sensitive, funny and sometimes painful. We hardly ever see you that way. How did you feel when you read the script?

I felt like there was something familiar there. I didn't really know why, but I liked my character, Pierre. I understood when we starting filming, and it was a little hard to swallow, actually: that role had come knocking on a door I had left shut since I was a kid. Pierre is kind of a loner, locked up in a sort of tough shell, and has a hard time expressing his feelings. So playing him was somehow instinctively obvious to me. But beyond my own role, I have to admit that I immediately loved the brother-sister clan idea that Jean-Paul and David Foerkins came up with. A trio always holding back, who have a hard time saying things to each other.

How did Jean-Paul Rouve present this project to you? What did you talk about?

Some films just simply happen, and "Lola and Her Brothers" is one of those films! Right now, I feel like everything easily fell into place because everyone and all the different elements fit into the project. Jean-Paul is an actor, too, and it was easy communicating with him. He just gave me a few tips about the characters and situations, but not much. Actually, he wanted the story to really come to life - he wanted my character Pierre to be a man who takes his time, so we would see that it's hard for him to talk and to love, that he gets too caught up in his troubles. When I've worked with actor-directors, things have often been simple like that, because we don't have to talk for hours! Plus, the essential was already right there in the script, which Jean-Paul wrote with David. They did a fabulous job. They created all the space we needed, so all we had to do was just play the scenes, between the words and the silences.

Do you and Jean-Paul Rouve know each other very well?

I was lucky to be able to do voicework with him and Marina Fois on the animated films "Madagascar" 1, 2 and 3, so we often saw each other at the promos. Back in the Canal + days, we would run into each other now and then. But I was very touched that he thought of me for this part, and on the set I discovered what I call a "good boss". Jean-Paul is a caring and good-natured director who does good work and a lot of it. He's very focused and listens to his team. The filming was fast and efficient, no frills.

How did you build your character Pierre, between the way he resonated with you personally and how he had to appear physically: tired, greying and a little heavy?

I figured I didn't want to make him ugly, because I thought he already had enough to deal with! Pierre is a simple guy, who doesn't make much of an effort with other people, but he is also a father and he's in a relationship with a lovely woman, played by Philippine Leroy-Beaulieu. So he also had to be kind of attractive. The problem is that he's a very reserved man who has let life overrun him. He's one of those people whose eyes are filled with tenderness but who aren't physically affectionate at all. The characters played by Ludivine and Jean-Paul are probably more touching. I'm more like a stone pillar! It's only towards the end that I start to open up to the rest of the world a little and breathe with new-found hope. But you know, there are plenty of guys like that in life. For the wardrobe, we also had to find things for him that were more or less attractive, so it wouldn't be like he was totally lost or had let himself go. To me, Pierre isn't a man who neglects himself, he's just rigid, like a big rock, which is what the word "pierre" means, actually. Hard to move.

Let's talk about your two main acting partners, starting with Ludivine Sagnier, who plays your sister Lola.

I fell in love with Ludivine professionally 30 years ago. I met her when she was only 12, on a show for Canal +: she played a little angel and I played a jerk who destroyed nature! I was totally crazy about that cute, well-balanced, extraordinary little girl. After that, we ran into each other several times and remembered that moment. Ludivine is a joy and a delight - first and foremost because she is a great actress, a ball of emotion and sensitivity, a precious asset on the set.

What about Jean-Paul Rouve, who plays your brother Benoit ?

He managed to perfectly split himself in two and be an excellent acting partner. That proves all the work he accomplished on this film. We never saw him worry about the things he did. I've known the atmosphere to be different in similar situations, where tension and stress got the best of everyone. Jean-Paul had completely thought out the story he wanted to tell. He made himself totally available as a director and an actor. We often clowned around on the shoot, without losing the thread of what we had to do.

Tell me about Ramzy, who is fabulous in the role of Zoher, Lola's fiancé.

The character is quite a bit like him, because in real life, Ramzy has that kind, attentive side, sweet and very physically affectionate. That type of role really suits him on screen: he is handsome, attractive and listens with empathy. I find his character very endearing. Once again, that comes from the preparation work Jean-Paul and David did. They knew how to envision exactly what was needed, to leave room for us to act with simplicity. Sometimes on a shoot, you have to use technique to make up for a lack of substance. In this case, all we had to do is let ourselves be carried forward.

"Lola and Her Brothers" is a comedy, but it's often very touching. It addresses deep themes such as heritage, parent-child relationships and mourning. Did that have any personal resonance with you as well?

Of course, because I'm very much a family person. When you're lucky enough to still have your parents around, too, you feel it's time to recognize what you've taken away from all that education and the way you've handed that down to your own children. So I think

there's an age for certain roles, and I know that ten years ago I wouldn't have had the same approach. Today, all I had to do was let myself be carried by the weight of life and my emotions. So I'd say this role reflects a certain maturity as far as I'm concerned.

On the subject of roles: I get the feeling you do less films these days, and probably choose them very carefully.

Yes. They are real choices. First of all, because now I'm interested in doing things I haven't done before, and that's not always easy. Secondly, the film industry has gone through amazing changes, accentuated by how predominant series have become. You can tell there is a real quality in the writing. The film industry is going to have to respond, because more and more it's getting to be a choice between blockbusters about blowing up planets or this new way of watching fiction while relaxing at home. Today it's tougher to find good subjects and directors who really film what's in their scripts, and to reinvent yourself as an actor. But still, luckily things are moving incredibly fast with series and specials, with very interesting crime drama and political themes to dig into. In today's film industry, I want to be part of contemporary and forward-thinking films.