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Romain Duris

02 Jul 2010

Who in their right mind wouldn't fall for Roman Duris? Gorgeous, sexy, talented, French, full head of hair - the only possible reason not to would be if you had a Duris equivalent (highly unlikely), or a better option waiting for you at home (impossible).

In French romantic comedy *Heartbreaker*, Vanessa Paradis proves to be a challenge on the seduction front for our favourite Gallic hottie, but then even his biggest fan (me) might think twice if **Johnny Depp** were keeping the bed warm.

Duris plays con artist Alex, who manipulates women into falling in love with him. He's employed by Paradis' father to break up her engagement to no, not Depp, but our very own Andrew Lincoln, he of *Teachers* and *Love Actually* fame. Dad thinks his daughter is settling for the safe but dull option. As cute as Lincoln is, given the selection on offer the result seems inevitable...

Alex shape shifts his persona dependent on the woman he's trying to conquer. The versatile actor has treated his career in much the same way. In the 34 films he's made during his 36 years on the planet, he's sashayed from comedy to tragedy with more ease than hot butter melting into French toast.

He wowed critics as a petty crook concert pianist in Jacques Audiard's 2005 complex masterpiece *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*, then swiftly moved on to play **Louis Garrel's** suicidal brother in Christophe Honoré's *Dans Paris*. Comedic roles followed with 2007's Molière and Cédric Klapisch's *Russian Dolls*, the fifth out of six films in total the actor and director have worked on together. (It was Klapisch who discovered Duris outside a Paris art school when he was a teenager and offered him a part in his film *Le Péril Jeune*. We are indebted to you Cédric.)

With no formal training, Duris takes his craft very seriously, rarely convinced before he accepts a part he will be able to cut the mustard. His critics have fewer reservations about his talent, nominating him for three Cesar Awards in all, though he has yet to claim the international recognition he deserves. In 2006 The New York Times Magazine featured him as one of the leading men of the future. Soon after that article came out he turned down a role as the baddie in *Casino Royale*. Maybe he's not bothered about cutting it in Hollywood.

Duris is the sort of man who can turn a granny's knees to jelly and who fathers wouldn't think twice about locking up their daughters over. I'd been trying to get hold of him, only in a professional capacity you understand, ever since I saw *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*. That day had finally come.

That morning he'd been interviewed on BBC Breakfast News and was an hour late. No matter because there he was offering up his hand to me in the plush offices of *Heartbreaker's* film distributors. Wearing light trousers, black jacket and a classically French blue and white stripey T-shirt, Duris' thick mop of bouncing black hair nestled atop that charismatic face with a light air of rogue about it. A Cheshire cat smile coursed through a forest of finely honed stubble as he shook my hand and, as I dreamily wander off into poetic reverie, I think to myself, 'Get a bloody grip woman'.

It's difficult to imagine the actor lying awake at night fretting he wouldn't be any good in the role of a seducer extraordinaire, but with the help of a translator our interview reveals a modest man aware, but uncomfortable, with his fame and sex symbol status.

Can you describe what sort of a person Alex is?

I tried to make him more of an actor than a seducer. I was afraid of playing someone who can seduce anybody. I tried to make it difficult for him to be a seducer and to make his character less confident so that he had doubts and would try to understand the woman who was in front of him and what she likes.

What would you say you have in common with Alex?

I don't know. I always try to make a character very different to me so when people ask me what are the similarities I never know because, for me, it's just a character.

"I wasn't sure if I could play a guy who was able to seduce anyone without playing him as a bastard. How could I make him touching?"

You've successfully avoided being typecast by choosing comedic and serious roles...

I like both, you know? When I'm shooting a drama scene, I think, 'Wow, I like it but I want to do something more light'. When I'm shooting a light comedy' I think, 'OK, I need to do drama now because I want to do something more profound'. I am lucky enough that I am offered proposals for both comedy and drama.

What have been particularly memorable parts for you?

Well, *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*. And I don't know if you know the Cédric Klapisch movies like *Russian Dolls* and the Tony Gatlif movies – *Gadjo Dilo* – it was amazing with the gypsies and I really liked the character. I have the fortune to be able to give something from myself, so for me it's always personal and I always want to leave my mark on a character so that he will be remembered. That is a personal achievement for me.



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When you read the script for *Heartbreaker* what was your initial opinion of Alex's behaviour?
I was afraid.

Why?

Because I wasn't sure if I could play a guy who was able to seduce anyone without playing him as a bastard. How could I make him touching? You read the script and by page 10 you think, 'Who is this guy?!' So it was difficult for me to imagine how I could make him more human, more sensitive, more honest, really.

"I always want to leave my mark on a character so that he will be remembered. That is a personal achievement for me."

Are there any of Alex's seduction routines you think are particularly clever or you would consider using yourself if you were single?

No. [Laughs]. No, no, no, no.

Really?

No. I'm not like that. I mean, maybe the thing Alex doesn't know is he doesn't need to be a seducer, but with Juliette [Paradis] he can just be himself. Maybe I am like that in my life, I don't know. That's it! No strategy, no, that's terrible.



How long did it take you to learn the *Dirty Dancing* routine?

I'm not sure because we rehearsed on the set. We were lucky that the make up artists were dancers as well so some times we decided to have a little moment of dance. So I don't know how many hours we spent but it was very natural.

Have you danced in a film before?

Yes, in Paris.

Can you sing?

I don't know but I have sung in movies, too.

"Gay or not, I am not conscious of who I am touching. And I don't want to have this consciousness...I want to play for everybody."

Would you be interested in doing a musical?

No. I don't think my voice is good enough.

But you were nervous about doing a romantic comedy and now you've done one, which has been a massive success...

Yes.

...so you could consider a musical.

No, no, no. I have other passions, you know? I used to be a drummer. For me, drumming is perfect. Singing is another job. If I had a voice like Ray Charles then of course, but no.



If you were a casting director who would you pick to play Alex and Juliette in the English language

remake?

Will Smith and Reese Witherspoon.

Why's that then?

I don't know.

You're just saying anybody. I don't believe you!

No, no, no. I like them. I'm sure they would be great in a romantic comedy.

"I like it when we have time in the film to see the character changing and to ask him some questions and see his own evolution...I want him to grow."

You play a victim of a male stalker in *Persecution*. How conscious are you of your gay fan base and what's the strangest fan experience you've ever had?

I've had no strange experiences with any fans and I'm not conscious of the public. You know, gay or not, I am not conscious of who I am touching. And I don't want to have this consciousness.

Why?

Because I want to play for everybody.

After the success of *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* you turned down a role in *Casino Royale* and continued mostly to work in France. How bothered are you about breaking into the big budget Hollywood arena?

I didn't turn the role down. It was just that I couldn't fit it into my schedule. I have done a movie in Hollywood afterwards and it was interesting, so if the character is strong and if I'm not being asked just to do a French lover, you know? In France, it's not a question of language - it's a question of character.



You said once: "I play characters who ask themselves questions, are seeking something, are somehow unfinished, or immature." Is that still the case now that you have a son?

It depends on the movie but I like it when we have time in the film to see the character changing and to ask him some questions and see his own evolution, you know? If you have the chance to see that in a movie, I like it because at the end of the film he's learned something. I like that. I want him to grow.

What's your next project?

I don't know because I'm doing some theatre.

What's the play?

It's by Patrice Chéreau, the director of *Persecution*. It's great and it's new for me. It's so intense.

Are you nervous?

We played four times and yes, I was very nervous, but I took some pleasure and I love the challenge.

[Read Our Review Of Heartbreaker »](#)

Click to see our image gallery, verdict, plot, trailer and queer ratings.

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Click to find out more about the French heartthrob.

Heartbreaker opens in UK cinemas on 2 July 2010.



Author: Rachael Scott

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