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## Entertainment : Film & TV : Interviews

### Melvil Poupaud

18 May 2006

**Melvil Poupaud is the lead actor of François Ozon's new film Time to Leave. He plays Romain, an arrogant fashion photographer who is diagnosed with terminal cancer and told he has three months to live.**

Rachael Scott chats to France's gorgeous new acting export about how he prepared for the role and being a gay sex symbol.

**It must have been quite a challenge to play Romain. What attracted you to the part?**

At first I was attracted to François - ah yes, because he is very handsome (laughs). We met each other before a few times when he wanted to see me for *Water Drops on Burning Rocks* (Ozon's third film) and then for *5x2*. I was too young, but we got along very well. He makes a lot of movies in different directions, which is very unusual for a French director and I've enjoyed all his work.

I wrote him a note inviting him to see some short movies I directed, he liked them and said he wanted to make a movie with me. So it was more the desire to work with him than a specific part. We talked about the script before he'd written it and I felt very close to the character from the beginning.

**So how did you psychologically prepare yourself to play someone that's going to die in three months?**

I took time to think about it because I didn't want to see people who were in that position. It could have been very uncomfortable for them and for me. And there was a physical preparation because François wanted me to be fitter. The character would seem very healthy in the beginning, so the contrast at the end would be stronger.

**Why do you think Romain decides to die on his own and not tell his boyfriend or his family?**

He's not lovable at all in the beginning, but once you get closer to him you understand him. For me, the reason he doesn't tell anyone is more that he's the only one who can find a solution and he takes his death as an opportunity to resolve some inner problems. It takes the last moments of his life for him to love himself.

**The approach is very un-American.**

I know people who have cried from the beginning to the end of the movie and others haven't shed a tear, but people have had very different reactions. For instance Jeanne Moreau and Catherine Deneuve thought I wouldn't die at the end. They were in complete denial.

**"He's not lovable at all in the beginning, but once you get closer to him you understand him.... It takes the last moments of his life for him to love himself."**

**Did you feel that there was added pressure on you because François rarely casts a male lead in his films?**

Yes. I think Romain is the character most like François. Even though I know he identified himself to each woman in *8 Women* and to Charlotte Rampling in *Swimming Pool*, here it's more direct. He's the same age as Romain, Parisian, gay and an artist.

At first I wasn't sure I could do the movie because I had to lose weight and face Jeanne Moreau and have those sex scenes, so I said, "If you think I can do it then I will do it". I felt proud that he chose me to incarnate a bit of him on screen.

**Talking of the sex scenes, how did you deal with that?**

It was alright. I could have been very frightened because I've never done these kind of scenes before and I'm quite shy, but I wasn't. I was becoming the character and I thought it was useful for the part to see Romain wanting to make love to his boyfriend. And I knew the scene would be well shot, not vulgar or voyeuristic.

**Are you gay or straight?**

Straight. I'm married and I have a daughter.

**So is it harder to have a sex scene with a boy when you're straight? Or do you just look at him as if he's a really ugly girl?**

No. No. He wasn't ugly, he was a nice guy. He was much more uneasy than I was. It was my first love scene with a guy too, so I was a kind of elder brother. I didn't realise that a beard could be so.... (grimaces and rubs his chin. laughs). We had red cheeks both of us, but basically it wasn't traumatising at all.

**When the film comes out you will become a gay sex symbol.**

No. I don't think so. I did some gay magazine covers and I wasn't a gay sex symbol in France.

**Gay men will fancy you.**



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You think so? (Laughs).

**Yes and you've earned a bit of a reputation for playing parts that are lovable bastards.**

Me?

**Yes.**

That's new because when I was younger I was more a romantic, a dark seducer you know?

**Ah, but still a seducer.**

Yes, maybe. Not in *Time to Leave* though. I was a bastard in the James Ivory movie, *Le Divorce*, but it was a very small part.

**"At first I wasn't sure I could do the movie because I had to lose weight and...have those sex scenes, so I said, "If you think I can do then it I will do it!"**

**Was it enjoyable making a film as commercial as *Le Divorce*?**

I wanted to work with James Ivory and Ishmail Merchant. They were generous and friendly, and I met Naomi Watts whom I love very much. She's a great actress, very natural.

**It's probably the most recognisable film this country has seen you in.** I've done an Eric Rohmer movie (*A Summer's Tale*), which has travelled a lot.

**And didn't you have three girls on the go in that film?**

(Laughs) Ah, the seducer of the beach!

**Do you find that you get cast in those sorts of roles?**

No. I always choose my movies because of the directors more than the part. It's more the pleasure of working with a good director like Rohmer or Ozon that gets me interested in the project than trying to calculate some kind of image.

**Who inspires you as an actor?**

George Clooney, as an actor and a producer and director. I think he's very intelligent and charming. I am good friends with Romain Duris, he's a very good actor.

**What will your next project be?**

I'm shooting a movie in April in New York that's directed by Zoe Cassavetes, John Cassavetes' daughter. It's a romantic comedy about a French man in New York. It's called *Broken English*.

**You're in a band aren't you?**

I was and I will be again maybe. I made two albums with my band and then we stopped because I was shooting a movie. Then I did a solo album, but now I've stopped playing music. I was a bit disappointed with the album and I'm not sure I'm very good at playing music.

**"It was my first love scene with a guy.... I didn't realise that a beard could be so.... (grimaces and rubs his chin. laughs). We had red cheeks both of us."**

**What about singing?**

Not good. No.

**Oh dear. That's not a great recipe for an album is it?**

(Laughs) It's very sad because I love it, but I have to face it I'm not very good.

**Have you been told this or is that just your opinion?**

I've been told. (Laughs) And I could tell myself. Once you realise you're good at some things you can't be good at everything.

Read our review of [Time To Leave](#) and our interview with [François Ozon](#).

**Time To Leave opens in the UK on 12 May 2006**

**Time To Leave opens in the UK on 12 May 2006**

**Time To Leave [2006]**

**Label:** Artificial Eye

**Released:** 25 September 2006

**ASIN:** B000GQMM1S

Buy the DVD of [Time to Leave](#) online and save yourself some money to put towards some other gay drama - films like [Juste Une Question D'Amour \(Just a Question of Love\)](#), [Love is the Devil](#), [Ethan Mao](#), [Slutty Summer](#), [Happy Endings](#), [Latter Days](#), [Eating Out](#), [Regular Guys](#) and [Cowboys & Angels](#).

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