



Stockbridge Community Cinema

Programme Notes 19 June 2026

Nouvelle Vague

France, US | 2025 | 106 min | Cert 12A

Director: Richard Linklater

Screenplay: Holly Gent, Vincent Palmo Jr, Michèle Pétin

Starring: Guillaume Marbeck, Zoey Deutch, Aubry Dullin



A precedent has been broken. The omens for a movie about the making of *À bout de souffle* (1960) were not favourable: comparable projects like *Hitchcock* (2012) and *Mank* (2020), about the makings of *Psycho* (1960) and *Citizen Kane* (1941) respectively, have not endured; and to me at least the prospect of a film about the birth of the French New Wave out of the much-mythologised milieu of *Cahiers du cinéma* seemed unenticing. To read some critics and historians you'd think that the French practically invented cinephilia: Truffaut, Godard, and the gang are commonly credited with seeing the worth in supposedly unsung Hollywood 'auteurs' like Nicholas Ray or even Hitchcock, and then making their own films in tribute. I assumed that this perspective would be faithfully reproduced on screen since it is so prevalent elsewhere, and – bluntly – because it is so flattering to American sensibilities. But I should never have doubted Richard Linklater, who has captured something unexpected while not stinting on the nostalgic pleasures that I had secretly wanted all along.

It plays to Linklater's ability to forge an ensemble from a cast of near-unknowns, as he did to spectacular effect with *Dazed and Confused* (1993). *Nouvelle Vague* is a delight, even quite probably for viewers

blessedly unversed in the mythology in which *À bout de souffle* is steeped, simply because it invites us to spend a few weeks in excellent company. At the core of it are Jean-Luc Godard (Guillaume Marbeck), his stars Jean Seberg (Zoey Deutch) and Jean-Paul Belmondo (Aubry Dullin), and his very small crew: assistant director Pierre Rissient (Benjamin Cléry), director of photography Raoul Coutard (Matthieu Penchinat), and continuity supervisor (or 'script girl') Suzon Faye (Pauline Belle), plus Seberg's husband François Moreuil (Paolo Luka-Noé). (Since all the dialogue was post-synched, there does not appear to have been anyone on sound.) There are internal frictions, particularly between Seberg and Godard, and Godard and producer Georges de Beauregard (Bruno Dreyfurst), but the ultimate impression is of an infectious joy in creation, as cast and crew come to see that for all his foibles Godard is worth persevering with and that the film they are making is out of the ordinary.

Biopics, films about history in general, have to confront the question of introductions, especially for characters on the periphery. Can the audience be expected to know who, for instance, Agnès Varda is; and if they can't, is there a way of introducing her that won't jar? Linklater's solution is twofold. Somehow without breaking the spell, he introduces each character with a face-to-

camera portrait-shot, giving their name on screen; but usually nothing more is said about them. You will gather from context that Roberto Rossellini and Robert Bresson are film directors, but not Varda or Alain Resnais. The device works because there are more names than could plausibly be done justice to, and because the alternative is talking down to the audience and there are few audiences that will recognise every name. What comes across is a sense of community, with a strong element of casual social contact that one doubts is characteristic of many professional filmmaking milieux today. If *Nouvelle Vague* treats Godard as a genius, he isn't an isolated one.

And it is an 'if': Linklater is not unduly reverent toward Godard, nor does he labour the significance of *À bout de souffle*, trusting his audience to make its own estimations and refusing to trade in the debased currency of greatness, mastery, significance, etc. If the lasting fame of *À bout de souffle* no doubt made the project more saleable than, say, a script on the making of Chabrol's *Les Cousins* (1959) or Rivette's *Paris nous appartient* (1961), one could imagine Linklater choosing *À bout de souffle* because it is a good size for a film about filmmaking. As well as involving comparatively few people, the production went on for all of 20 days, few of them spent in the same place twice. And so, as few if any making-of fictions have done or could feasibly do, *Nouvelle Vague* is able to show every day of the shoot, not out of a sense of duty but because it better conveys the breathless, timebound nature of feature production, as well as the ebb and flow of the film's central relationships.

Without consulting all the histories and biographies, I can't guarantee that everything in the film happened exactly as depicted, but while this is not an irrelevant consideration, the film excels in showing the contingent nature of filmmaking and of this film in particular. Shots that have appeared on posters and book jackets were taken just

once, by a group of people who could not have been sure the film would have a life beyond its premiere. Tellingly, the film ends before the premiere, at a private screening for Beauregard, Chabrol, Truffaut (earlier, Godard has attended the Cannes premiere of his debut *The 400 Blows*) and Suzanne Schiffman, who was later a key collaborator of both Godard and Truffaut as well as Rivette. Everything that followed, even the success of *À bout de souffle*, is confined to a few title cards that could easily be dispensed with. For Linklater, and for Linklater's Godard, what comes next is secondary, precisely because Godard's filmmaking philosophy, articulated more than once in the film, is one of spontaneity.

The script is peppered with Godardian epigrams, some possibly modified, but one that stands out is his line that *À bout de souffle* is a documentary about Jean Seberg and Jean-Paul Belmondo acting out a fiction – the fleetingness is part of the point. In its concern with time, in this case with the evanescent, *Nouvelle Vague* is a Linklater film through and through, and not merely a nostalgic tribute to a lost world. But of course, it is that too, and how: this paean to the spontaneous is also a painstaking and presumably CGI-heavy reconstruction of Paris in August-September 1959, in gleaming black-and-white, with fake cigarette burns for non-existent reel changes. Sometimes we are essentially seeing reverse angles on famous scenes from a beloved film. Linklater may well have found the very field Belmondo runs through near the start. Along with his Lorenz Hart biopic *Blue Moon*, that makes two films in a year Linklater has set in a more aesthetically pleasing past. 'Withdrawal in disgust is not the same as apathy,' he said in *Slacker* (1990). Well, maybe. I watched it twice in a week.

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