

LOLA



A Review by Garry Victor Hill

Cast:

Lola / Cecile; Anouk Aimee

Roland Cassart: Marc Michel

Cecile Desney: Anne Duperoux

Madam Desnoyers Elena Labourdette

Yvon: Gerard Desarroche

Frankie: Alan Scott

Michel: Jaques Horden

The Diamond Smugler: Jacques Lebretac

Cassart's Employer: Raphael Hery

Madame Frederi: Yvette Anziani

Jeanne Margo Lion

Claire: Corianne Marchand

Dolly: Dorotheè Blank

Daisy: Corianne March

Credits:

Director and writer: Jacques Demy

Producers: Georges de Beauregard and Carlo Ponti

Editors: Anne-Marie Cotret and Monique Teisseire

Music: Michael Legrand

Photography: Raul Coutard (Black and White)

Production Company: Rome Paris Films :

Length: 90 minutes

Release Date: 3rd March 1961 France

Rating: 85%

Copyright

Copyright Fair use,

<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=7196409>

(Poster)

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Identite-Demy-1956->

[Sacem.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Identite-Demy-1956-Sacem.jpg) *(Portrait of Jacques Demy)*

Review

Three important films which would obviously initiate a great cultural change emerged in 1961. These were *Lover Come Back*, *La Dolce Vita* and *Lola*. All three in their different ways went against the usual even ubiquitous depiction of women who enjoy sex, who express their sexuality or who are willing to engage in sex outside marriage as being bad. In assorted cultural depictions, such women are punished by society or set themselves on a tragic path or have a tragic fate awaiting. (cliché intended). Whichever of these dire fates overwhelm them. they are denied success or happiness.

Few heroines escape and even amongst those some level of suffering emerges. Moll Flanders, Scarlet O'Hara, Lady Chatterley and Katheen Windsor's Amber all suffer, before ending up safe from danger and prosperous in a world of privilege. In the 1950s film *Madeline* the eponymous, adulterous, heroine is held in custody for murder and although acquitted, will spend the rest of her life under suspicion of getting away with murder.

In contrast to these few examples in the "bad women punished" genre suddenly these three different cinematic examples emerge in 1961. Obvious reasons are easy to find. 1960 would simultaneously see the ending of Hollywood's McCarthyist black list, the easing of strong cultural censorship with the *Lady Chatterley's Lover* case in London and the potential removal of fears of pregnancy with the arrival of the effective contraceptive pill by prescription. Behind what was obvious other forces were at work. The greatest economic boom the world had ever seen was leading to "the sweet life" (*La Dolce Vita* translated) for many indeed. Economically for many having children was no longer a great hardship and with contraceptives giving the choice to have them or not, rarely such a burden. McCarthyism and other red scare repressions were not only aimed at Communism, but

liberal attitudes and with the discrediting of MacCarthy, liberalism was emerging as stronger force. This tendency was also reinforced by increasing secularism across the Christian world and to liberal interpretations within Christianity.

In *Lola* a woman who has been sexually involved at fourteen and soon after had a child, now earns her living by dancing. Lola (Anouk Aimee) is her stage name, she was born Cecile Desnoyes. While scantily dressed at a Nantes nightclub, she is depicted as a decent person. In her song, sung directly into the camera in medium close-up, she makes it clear that she is not a prostitute, only flirts as she dances with customers and sings to entertain. Her honesty, loyalty, courtesy and being a good mother to her son are always evident. She explains her desire to be happy as being based in an optimistic outlook on life, an existence filled with joy. Her aim for happiness does not involve gaining luxury, glory, triumphing over others, obsessive desires or praise. Nothing that happens reveal any of these things as things that she wants. What she does want is her first lover, Michel (Jaques Horden), the father of Yvon, (Gerard Delarroche) seven-year-old son, back in her life. She is set on this hope without being neurotic or obsessive, nor is she puritanical or guilt-ridden about her past sex life or current occupation. Although she clearly enjoys expressing her sensuality, she expresses it through music, dance and her costume.

Although the film clearly must be focused on its eponymous heroine, Lola's situation and character emerge slowly as she does not appear until well into the film. The film's narrative resembles apparently unrelated threads eventually entwining to reveal her situation.

It starts with a pensive man on a Nantes esplanade looking out to sea. His obviously expensive large showy car, cowboy hat, sunglasses and stylish suit mark him out as nouveau rich and possibly American or a returned expatriate. Soon he zooms down the esplanade past a group of American sailors who tell him to learn to drive.

The film then cuts to Roland Cassart (Marc Michel) a twenty something, disaffected, loud, cranky and somewhat aimless office

worker who is willfully late again as he unburdens his problems and his personality onto a stoic café proprietor who must man her counter and give him more credit. Soon they are joined by Jeane (Margo Lion) who is in an excited state because she thinks she saw her long-lost son, Michael drive by. Roland finally arrives at work where he ignores the good advice of his business manager (Raphael Hèry) and speaks provocatively, ensuring his sacking. Although he has no other options. Roland then goes to a bookshop and hearing from a schoolgirl Cecile Desnoy (Anne Duperoux) and her mother (Elena Labourdette) that they want an English language textbook that he has but the shop does not, so he offers to give it to them and gets a dinner invitation, which is more than that. Madam Desnoy is considering romantic possibilities

So far four different narrative strands have emerged and three of them concern Roland and the other, the first, concerns Michael, the enigmatic cowboy. Not one apparently concerns Lola, – apparently: yet in reality they all do. Lola has not appeared on the screen yet. The same group of sailors who mocked Michael earlier that morning turn up at a dance hall and one of them, who resembles the cowboy after a change of clothes, latches on to Lola, who already knows him as Frankie (Alan Scot). She takes him home and they become lovers or resume a past sexual relationship, but his ship is sailing as an American sailor he must leave so they part amiably, if not permanently. Perhaps next voyage.... Frankie is a Michael clone.

Meanwhile restless Roland deliberately meets a diamond smuggler (Jacques Lebreton) in a Nantes shop and he gives him cash and diamonds to take to Holland and then travel to South Africa. The smuggler makes it clear what is expected and why and that it could be fatal if anything goes wrong: Roland is not a dupe. When Madam Desnoy asked why he is taking such a risk, he talks of being bored. She obviously and sensibly reverses her interest. He persists with this assignment having the money and the diamonds on him after he returns to the smuggler's Nantes shop where a large crowd have gathered, watching the smuggler's boss being carted off by police.

In an arcade Roland and Lola literally collide and recognize each other. She is delighted, he is pleased, but in an intense way. Lola's delight continues as they chat and their talk reveals to the audience that they were involved in a high school romance. About a decade before It also revealed to the viewer that Lola is only slowly waking up to the way that Roland's intense manner reveals an expression of a neurotic, self-destructive personality. That becomes clearer after they argue. Although he is usually temperamental; she gives him reasons as she has a way of bringing up Michael that makes it clear that anyone else is another default choice. Apart from youth and good looks, Roland, remains an option because he connects to her happy adolescence and Michel vanished seven years before. Her other possibility is Frankie, the Michael look alike

Writer-Director Jacques Demy has centred this film on romance, but he eschews the melodramatic or even the overly dramatic which usually dominate romantic dramas, as if the characters do not have to worry about money, children, work for a living or in extreme examples, think about anything else. In Josef Von Steinberg's *The Blue Angel* (1930) which is a very loosely based inspiration for *Lola*, the narrative is very much in this overly romantic mode. Fortunately, in Demy's *Lola* the romances unfold in a real world where the lives of his characters centre on all those things that do make up modern urban life, work, housework, caring for children and seeing friends. Another difference is that in *The Blue Angel* the depictions and attitudes to sex are sordid and guilt ridden. That Lola (Marlene Deitrich) has a manipulating, repulsive personality. The claustrophobic setting of the dreary dance hall, which dominates that film, reinforces this view: sex starts in sordid locales. In contrast Demy opens up his film to the city of Nantes without either prettifying it or making it sordid. Only a few shortish scenes are in the dance hall, which is only slightly run down. For all the characters except Roland, sex and romance are just a part of life, not what life is about.

For all the characters life goes on without any great tragedies or glory because they make right choices. The exception is Roland. Despite his self-absorption he has little if any self-knowledge,

which means he is heading for self-destruction as he leaves Nantes with hot diamonds and cash.

On its 1961 release *Lola* got favourable, if not ecstatic reviews and Demy's successful career in full-length feature films took off. In 1969 he did make a sad sequel to *Lola* when he should have left well enough alone. In 2001 a restored digitalized version of the 1961 film was issued and served as the film to review here.



Jacques Demy 1931-1990