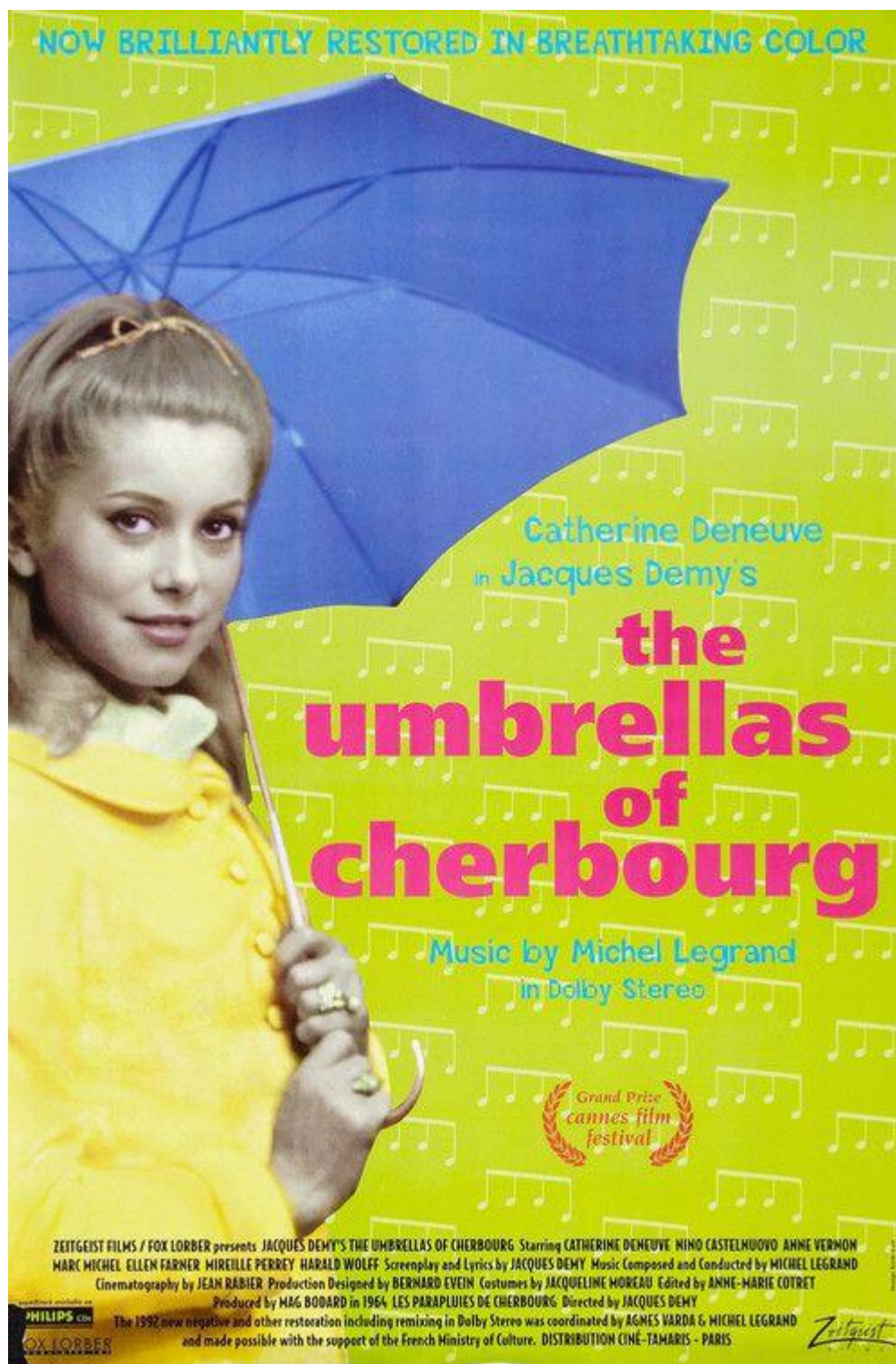


# The umbrellas of Cherbourg





*Reviewed by Garry Victor Hill*

Directed and written by Jacques Demy. Produced by Mag Bodard.  
 Production Design by Bernard Evin. Cinematography by Jean Rabier. Music  
 by Michael Legrand. Edited by Anne-Marie Cotret & Monique Teisseire.  
 Costume Design: Jacqueline Moreau. Cinematic length: 91 minutes.  
 Distributed by Twentieth Century Fox. Cinematic release: February 1964.  
 DVD release: 2004. Blue Ray release: 2013. Check for ratings. Rating 90%.  
 Restoration versions 1992. 1998 and 2013

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## Cast

Catherine Deneuve as Geneviève Emery

Nino Castelnuovo as Guy Foucher

Anne Vernon as Madame Emery

Marc Michel as Roland Cassard

Ellen Farner as Madeleine

Mireille Perrey as Aunt Élise

Jean Champion as Aubin

Pierre Caden as Bernard

Jean-Pierre Dorat as Jean

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## Review

Genevieve: “I can’t live without him!”

Mother: “Nonsense. People only die for love in movies.”

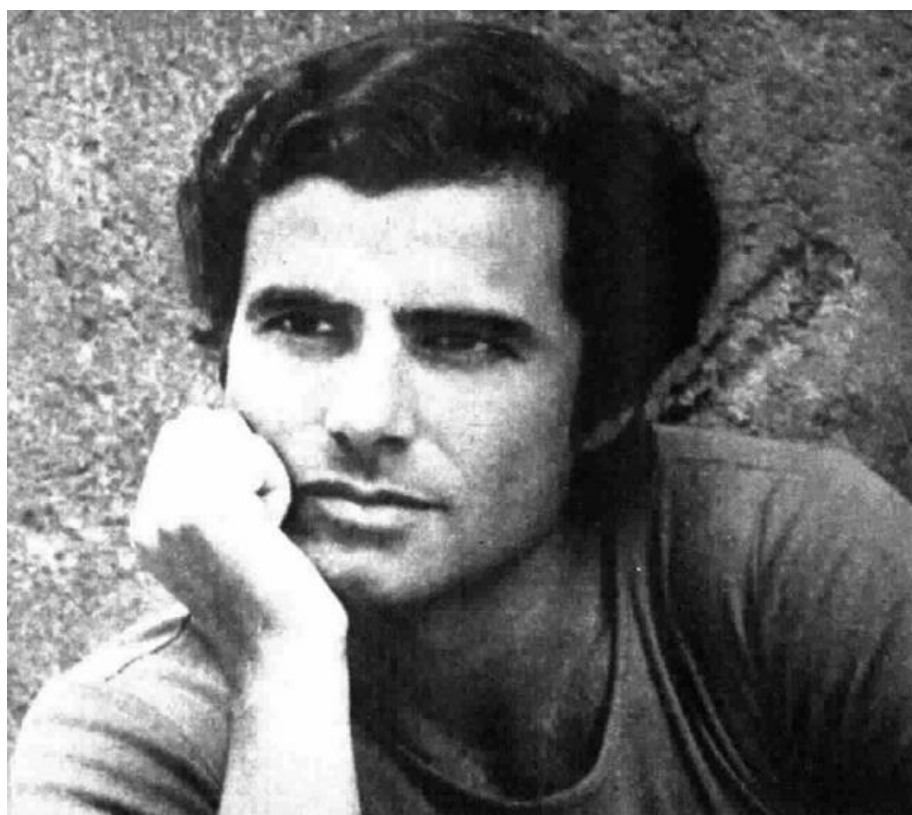
Not in this movie. In that exchange between a sixteen year old and her widowed mother we have the core idea of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*. Despite being totally sung, which puts it in the operatic genre, despite being about passionate young lovers who agonise over being parted in the best operatic tradition, despite the lyrics pledging eternal love (“if it takes forever I will wait for you”) this film is ultimately about romantic realities.

With the music going between the upbeat and the sweetly lilting and the frequently bright colours in the interiors, the film has a sense of optimism.

This gives us a false sense of what will happen and the traditional plot of romantic operas which we expect this film to follow reinforces that. The first of the three parts of the film entitled (“The Departure”) fits into traditional operatic plots as the lovers are separated, but vow to overcome the world and reunite to be together forever. Then in the next part (“The Absence”) the plot moves far away from traditional opera and goes into realities, for what does a sixteen year old girl do when she is pregnant, her conscripted lover is in the army fighting a war in far off Algeria and her only support is her impoverished mother? In the last third of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* the denouement is shorn of operatic drama, tragedy and passion and becomes believable. Everybody must make compromises, primarily with life’s patterns and pressures and then with each other.

Both the characters and the settings are very different to romantic operas. There are no rich princes, bejewelled damsels or castles here. In 1957 Cherbourg Guy Foucher (Nino Castelnuovo) is a mechanic repairing cars who dreams of owning his own petrol station. He shares an apartment with his ailing godmother Aunt Èlise (Claire Leclerc) Geneviève Emory (Catherine Deneuve) also shares an apartment, with her mother Madame Emory (Anne Vernon). Their apartment is above their shop, titled ‘The Umbrellas of Cherbourg.’ As the title suggests they sell one thing, umbrellas and as economic realities suggest, people in a small shop selling only one thing will struggle. When a bill for eighty thousand francs comes in the Emory’s are in trouble. Enter a traditional character to the rescue, the rich and handsome prince, Roland Cassard. A wealthy businessman, he rapidly becomes entranced with beautiful, sweet Geneviève, as any man would be. She however is entranced with Guy and they talk of marriage. Then his conscription notice for military service in the Algerian war arrives She offers to hide him and then pleads with him not to go, but love has hit an irresistible force and when he has to leave she promises to wait for his two year service to be over. Two months later when she finds out she is pregnant by him and he rarely writes...

*The Young Lovers*

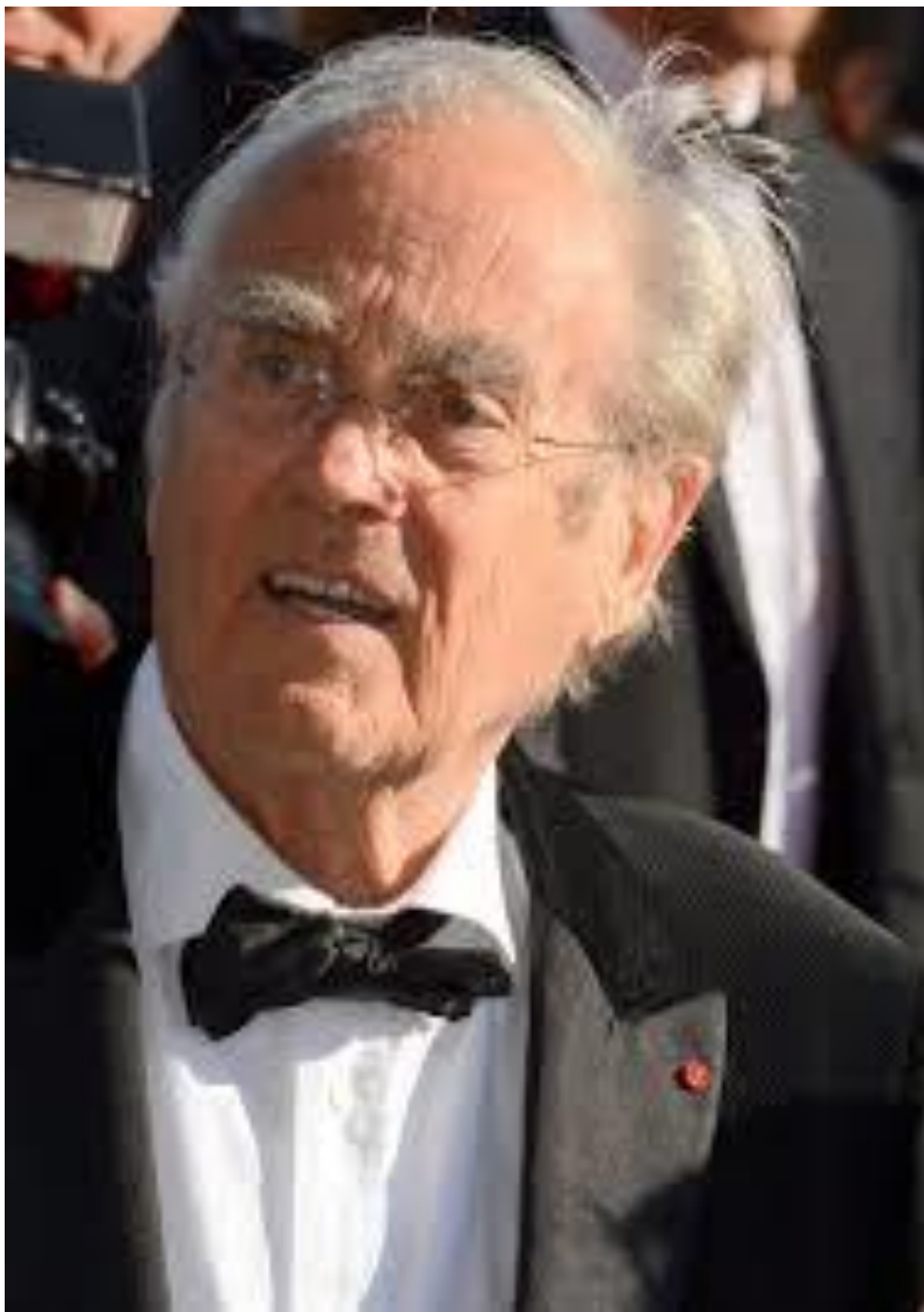


*Cherbourg's dreary exteriors contrast with bright interiors. Are the characters are striving to bring brightness into their lives?*





*Demy wisely chose to contrast these interior colours with the repair shop, the petrol station, grey Chebourg and the fallen snow and black night sky of the last scene.*



*Composer Conductor Michael Legrand.*



Unlike in traditional operas in this film love does not conquer all, marriage to a handsome prince is a rare opportunity and must be worked on for its advantages and life cannot be wasted on lost loves, happiness can come again.

The film was a great success with critics, the public and within the global cinematic industry. Amongst its many awards were the 1964 Palme d'Or at the Cannes film Festival and five Academy Award nominations. This was almost unprecedented for a foreign language film. In the year when *My Fair Lady* and *Mary Poppins* were competing for the Oscars in the musical field it was unsurprising that this film did not win. *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* had another effect on cinema as well, it was not Deneuve's first film but it was her film and brought her global attention. Catherine Deneuve was soon acclaimed as the most beautiful woman in the world and while how such things are judged remains a mystery and subjective, looking at her in this film gives reasons why. Her career took off in ways that recalled Bardot and Monroe. Director Remy and Composer/Conductor Legrand also had massive and deserved career boosts.

Perhaps the film had another effect.

The Big hit of 2017, *La La Land* has been praised for its originality but it bears many resemblances to Jacques Remy's *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* (1964). Both are musicals about young lovers in a city setting battling against social pressures that threaten to tear them apart. In both films colour appears as extraordinarily bright. Both films have segments signaled by captions and an epilogue that comes "five years later." This being after the split. In both films the epilogue virtually says that lost love is not the end of life or even a permanent depressant. Life continues and by making adjustments people can be happy. However the differences are wide. The twenty-first century setting for *La La Land* is a world away from 1950s Cherbourg and the young lovers there are not wannabes in the entertainment world, they just want to survive together.

DVD versions of *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* are from the much needed 1992 restoration, Blur Ray used another restoration [process in 2013]. By the later 1960s audiences (including this reviewer) were noting that the much praised sound and colour quality of this film were faded. Not now, not with this beautiful restoration by Demy's widow, Michael Legrand and many others.

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*Jacques Demy 1931-1990*



*Michael Legrand*

