

## The Rose Maker

Arriving just in time for budding spring comes a new French crowd-pleaser, all about roses--and the people who love and grow them. Timely, too, because "The Rose Maker" (*La Fine Fleur*) is a sweet, dead-pan comedy, offering a delicate distraction from our current and caustic political and international environment. Its star is a paragon of French stage and screen, Catherine Frot, last seen in the US in a wonderful French paraphrase of the life of the deluded singer Florence Foster Jenkins.

Frot plays Eve Vernet, dedicated but small-time rose breeder, who has inherited from her father a beautiful but modest nursery which is no longer economically viable. The highpoint of her year is the annual rose competition outside Paris where she regularly places second to the Lamarzelle company, a corporate outfit that cares more about mass rose production than individual rose quality. To invigorate her output—and save her farm—her loyal long-time assistant, Vera (Olivia Cote), hires three released prisoners to learn the trade and do the scutwork. The new workers are a mixed trio: Wazir (Fatsah Bouyahmed) the oldest, a complainer desperate for a "permanent contract," Nadège (Marie Petiot), a painfully bashful young woman, and Fred (Manel Foulgoc), an ex-felon who turns out to be a natural cultivator.

As the newcomers blend into the work under Eve's tough but tender guidance, the Vernet team purloins two special roses from the Lamarzelle complex in hopes of producing a new hybrid which will jump-start their business for the next season (and get even with the company, headed by Lamarzelle himself (Vincent Dedienne), who wants to buy Eve out. They do everything to produce this unique hybrid using especial care, only to have their transplants fail, both in strength and fragrance (a hailstorm doesn't help). Eve is distraught and looks to sell her operation.

A miracle arrives when the unassuming Nadège discovers, in the nick of time, that one pot of set-aside practice roses has all the qualities of a winner, and Vernet Flowers gains a new lease on life and is once again a contender for prizes. Within a year, the inexperienced ex-cons have reinvented this artisanal rose business.

The small cast does a fine job of realizing their characters with Fred leading the league as a rough-hewn schlep who wakes up to smell the flowers, led by his nose (pardon me) for the blossoms. An actress now in her 60's, Frot (who has made 100 films in the last 50 years) is a great choice for Eve, a rose-obsessive who lives on the edge of her passion but comes through in the end.

As a film about roses, the film stands out for its vivid rows of colors and sun-draped flower fields, shot by Guillaume Deffontaines--a balm for the eyes. It's hardly a movie to startle or move one, and there is little risk in its outcome, but it is sweet and charming, making it—as the French say--a lovely bagatelle.

(*The film is now in area cinema, is rated PG-13, and runs 95 minutes*).

(April)