

GOYA ON GODARD

Interview by Yves Salgues

GOYA: On November 7, I got a phone call from Daniel Fillipachi, the director of artists and repertory at RCA. Daniel said to me in his usual laconic way, "Godard's going to call you. He saw your picture in the papers. He's got a role he's going to offer you. It's made for you. Keep me posted. Bye." And Godard did get in touch with me, and told me to meet him at the Bar des Theatres on Avenue Montaigne.

Were you scared?

I was more intrigued than scared. Godard arrived: glasses like some minor functionary's, a dark beard, long hair, a worn raincoat and a gloomy look about him. He didn't say much. "I don't know anything about singing," he said, "but I'm interested in working with you. If it interests you, if you like films, you'll say yes. If not, there's no use my insisting." "I don't know how to act. I'm not an actress," I insisted. "That's exactly it," he answered, "that's what I'm looking for: creatures who are neither film nor stage actress."

You didn't even think to have him tell you the plot of the film?

At that time, Godard didn't have any precise idea of the scenario he'd be filming from. He spoke to me, very vaguely, of a story by Maupassant, "Paul's Mistress," that he was thinking of following, but not very close at all, and of my probable partner, Jean-Pierre Léaud. On the other hand, he had me talk to him for more than an hour: about what I liked, how I lived, what I'd read, what kind of music I admired, and so on. Then he asked me to show him some photos. He finally said good-bye and said "I'll call you again in two weeks."

He obviously kept his word.

Almost to the minute. "If you think it would be fun to make a film with me, I'll send you a contract," he said to me. "We begin next week."

What happened when you had your baptism before the camera?

On the morning of November 22, I arrived at a café, at Port des Lilas. I tried to find out where the make-up woman was: there wasn't any. I was stupefied to find neither spots nor floodlights. They were filming with natural light: just the light of the café. That's what the Godard style is all about... Jean-Pierre Léaud, whom I didn't know from Adam -- or Eve -- came over to me and, looking me straight in the eye, asked me point blank, "Will you marry me?" I told him: "We'll see later. I'm in a hurry. Bye." I went home at noon. It was the end of the work day.

originally published in the French magazine 24 Heures