



LOUISE SNIDER

'Cousin' bright with romance

Love, laughter and spontaneity, a combination of ingredients not often found in recent movies, are brought together with Gallic wit and English subtleties in the new French film "Cousin, Cousine."

On the surface, we have a typical romantic farce. But the treatment, fresh and sparkling, is quite atypical, the principals, Marthe and Ludovic, are such glowing and wholesome lovers, Ludovic's philosophy of life is so clearly expressed, and the pattern of their romance is so inventively shown against the tapestry of a humorous, vital family life.

The movie opens with a wedding banquet. Marthe, a widowed mother, played with great gusto by Ginette Garcin, has just returned. The family is celebrating. The grandchildren have been warned to behave properly. Naturally, it is the adults who behave most improperly. They get drunk, act outrageous and generally carry on in the happy, British manner which certain occasions seem to demand.

Among the rowdies and mischievous children are two gossamer guests, Marthe (Marie Christine Barrault) and Ludovic (Victor Lanoux). Distant cousins who have just met, they sit waiting for the return of their errand spouses. They talk and dance, while away the time. Each learns that the other is married and has one child. Marthe's husband and Ludovic's wife finally return—together, offering guilty looks and feeble excuses. The party's over. Everyone goes home.

LUDOVIC SEEMS out Marthe and they begin to meet frequently. They develop a glowing and deliberately platonic friendship. They swim, indulge at a party, buy funny presents for each other and talk about their lives. Ludovic is a free spirit. He has worked at many different jobs, he changes them every three years. Now he teaches dancing, "the jerk, the Charleston," and thinks about going to a Pacific island.

We get to know Ludovic and to understand his actions and motivations. He is a very loving and tolerant person. He explains that his tolerance is not indifference, but a genuine respect for the freedom of other people. When his wife wants him to chastise his daughter for a rude remark, he smiles and replies, "That is her opinion."

Marthe's character is never explored in depth. We see her as personable and fun-loving. All she tells us is that she failed at love as a youngster, and she would like to travel. We surmise from her relations with Ludovic and from the actions of her spirited, saucy mother that Marthe nurtures the same zest for life.

During their platonic courtship, Marthe and Ludovic enjoy delicious private jokes about the salacious things people say about them. In contrast to their ingenueness, Pascal, Marthe's husband, is an unabashed romantic. His stated goal is to beat Casanova's record of conquests. Karine, Ludovic's wife, is a nervous, eccentric woman who also has been unfaithful.

Ironically, Karine and Pascal drop their other affairs and become interested in their spouses as their spouses become uninterested in each other. Marthe and Ludovic move from a platonic to a physical relationship. They make love with the same fresh, playful spirit that characterized their initial friendship. To the dismay of the family, they are openly affectionate and honest about their relationship.

ONE OF THE JOYS of this movie is seeing the interaction of a large family group—children and adults, singles and couples, widows and widowers. The camera is an observant, impartial spectator witnessing the incidents and emotions which family gatherings produce—quarrels, hugs, tears, games, gossip.

The ending, a family Christmas party, is a real delight. This family may not be a typical French family, but for 85 minutes the excellent acting, directing and photography convince us that it is, or that it doesn't matter.

"Cousin, Cousine" is the kind of entertaining movie that can be seen when French movies don't announce themselves as "art films." Perhaps that is why, according to Variety, it has been doing so well at the box office. Audiences already to enjoy a lighthearted, non-preentious movie, particularly when it is so brightly and competently made.

DINING AND ENTERTAINMENT Guide

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NEW RELEASES

ALEX AND THE GYPSY (R): Jack Lemmon as nasty Alex and Genevieve Bujold as the kooky gypsy in a flick that's supposed to be comic but is mostly mean. The actors deserved something better.
BITTERSWEET LOVE (PG): An old-fashioned tear jerker about young love foiled because of old love. The plot is right out of the daytime soaps shows. Lana Turner, Robert Lansing and Celeste Holm do a creditable job.
CARWASH (PG): A day in the life of a carwash with a spirited cast, a disco beat and anal jokes. The large ensemble includes Richard Pryor, the Pointer Sisters, George Carlin and Irwin Corey.
THE FRONT (PG): Woody Allen and an excellent cast including Zero Mostel, Hershel Bernardi and Gene Hackman recreate the idiosyncrasy and tragedy of the blacklisting era of the 1950s.
MARATHON MAN (R): A spy thriller which overweighs a terrific cast with a surfeit of blood and violence. Laurence Olivier, Dustin Hoffman, William Devane and Roy Scheider give it their best.
OBSESSION (PG): Suspenseful romance with Cliff Robertson as a man who falls in love with a woman who looks just like his dead wife. Some bizarre consequences are the result.
THE RITZ (R): All the hormone jokes you would expect when a straight running from hit men unwittingly hides out in a gay bathhouse. Jack Weston and Rita Moreno do a good job with some lackluster material.
SILENT MOVIE (PG): Mel Brooks makes a silent movie about a guy making a silent movie in 1914. Inspired jokes, sick jokes and slapstick keep things moving.

BACK AGAIN

ALICE DOESN'T LIVE HERE ANYMORE (PG): Ellen Burstyn in her Academy Award winning role as gassy Alice, a spunky, middle-aged widow who sets out for California with no money, a teenage son and lots of problems.
LENNY (R): Traces the better career and trials of nightclub comic Lenny Bruce, played by Dustin Hoffman. Valerie Perrine plays Bruce's wife.
ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST (R): Academy Award winner Jack Nicholson in confrontation with authority in a mental hospital.
RAFFERTY AND THE GOLD DUST TWINS (R): Alan Arkin, Sally Kellerman and Mackenzie Phillips are the title characters who trek across the country on a wild spree.

MOVIE RATING GUIDE

G: General audiences admitted. All ages admitted.
PG: Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
R: Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
X: No one under 18 admitted.