

**KINO LORBER**  
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presents

**LIFE OF RILEY**  
A film by Alain RESNAIS

With Sabine AZÉMA, Hippolyte GIRARDOT, Caroline SILHOL Michel  
VUILLERMOZ, Sandrine KIBERLAIN and André DUSSOLLIER

Duration 1h48 – ratio 2.55:1 – sound 5.1 – France – 2013

**A Kino Lorber Release**

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## CAST

Kathryn - Sabine AZÉMA  
Colin - Hippolyte GIRARDOT  
Tamara - Caroline SILHOL  
Jack - Michel VUILLERMOZ  
Monica - Sandrine KIBERLAIN  
Simeon - André DUSSOLLIER  
Tilly - Alba Gaia BELLUGI

## CREW

Directed by Alain RESNAIS  
Producer - Jean-Louis LIVI  
Screenplay - Laurent HERBIET, Alex REVAL  
Dialogues - Jean-Marie BESSET  
Based on the play "Life of Riley" by Alan AYCKBOURN  
Production Manager - Christophe JEAUFFROY  
Draw - BLUTCH  
Photography - Dominique BOUILLERET  
Set Design - Jacques SAULNIER  
Sound - Jean-Pierre DURET  
Editing - Gérard HARDY, Gérard LAMPS, Hervé DE LUZE  
Music - Mark SNOW  
Coproduction - F comme film, France 2 Cinéma  
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With the support of the PROCIREP



## SYNOPSIS

In the Yorkshire countryside, the lives of three couples are upset for a few months, from Spring to Fall, by the enigmatic behavior of their friend George Riley.

When general practitioner Dr. Colin inadvertently tells his wife Kathryn that the days of his patient George Riley should be numbered, he doesn't know that George was Kathryn's first love.

Both spouses, who are rehearsing a play with their local amateur theatre company, convince George to join them. It allows George, among other things, to play strong love scenes with Tamara, who is married to Jack, his best friend, a rich businessman and unfaithful husband.

A tearful Jack tries to persuade Monica, George's wife who left him to be with Simeon the farmer, to go back to her husband in order to support him during his last months. George has a strange seductive power over Monica, Tamara and Kathryn, which highly upsets those men sharing their lives with the three women.

Which one will George Riley take on holidays in Tenerife with him?



## A WORD FROM THE FILMMAKER

Why is the original title *AIMER, BOIRE ET CHANTER*, which has nothing to do with the original title of Alan Ayckbourn's play, "Life of Riley?" It's a question of rhythm. Pink Floyd's music permeated all through the play. That to me indicated a specific era, the 1960s and 1970s, and I wanted to move away from it. I try hard to give rhythm to the changes of pace in a film, so that the directing is full of contrast: moments when the direction is reserved and academic, and then suddenly there's a change in tone. Here's what I dream of: that the viewer in the movie theater says to himself, "yeah, okay, it's filmed theater," and then suddenly changes his mind: "yes, but in theater you can't do that..." And it goes back and forth from theater to film, and sometimes over to comic strips with Blutch's input. I'd like to try to achieve what Raymond Queneau called in *Saint-Glinglin* "la brouchecoutaille," a sort of *ratatouille*, by breaking down the walls between film and theater and thus ending up totally free. I say it for all my films: what interests me is form, and if there's no form, there's no emotion. I still get a kick out of bringing together things that shouldn't meet. It's what I call the attraction of danger, of the abyss. Keeping constantly in mind the standard answer I give the question, "Why do you make movies?" - "To see how they're made." So I naturally fell for Ayckbourn's theater, which might seem like light comedy, but that's not at all the case. Just look at the risks he takes with dramatic construction every time. One day he said this, "I try to do cinema with my theater, and Resnais does theater for the cinema."

How did it all begin? I had read in a magazine that the very prolific Mr. Ayckbourn was putting on his plays in the little seaside resort of Scarborough, in a theater in which the audience itself served as the three walls. Sabine and I went up there as if on a safari deep into an exotic jungle. We saw one play. The actors had to keep in mind the three "walls" of viewers and, as for the audience; it had to take a leap of faith to believe what they couldn't see. That's also a good definition of the cinema. From that point on, I told myself, "That's my man." We kept returning to Scarborough for four or five years anonymously until one day an actor recognized me during intermission and said, "What are you doing here? The French never come here. There are Japanese, Germans, but not French." Ayckbourn and I finally met, we had a beer, and I complimented him. He sighed, "Obviously I'm not Chekhov." I answered, "Well, no, you're much better than Chekhov." It was an encounter filled with emotion. A few years later I saw Sabine laughing to herself reading a huge Ayckbourn play entitled "Intimate Exchanges," which only used two actors to play a multitude of characters, but you had to go to the theater twelve times to see the entire play! I went to see Ayckbourn to ask him if he'd agree for me to adapt it into what was to become *SMOKING/NO SMOKING*. He had some forty plays to his credit at the time. He said to me, "I was prepared for anything except for you to pick that one. You're even crazier than I am." And I knew from reading an article that he hated people making films from his plays due to the obligations it involved, so I made him a promise: "If I find a producer who's willing to finance the film, I won't tell you, I won't call you, I won't ask you to read the adaptation, I won't invite you to dinner. You'll hear nothing from me until the film is finished and I can show it to you. Then and only then you can decide whether or not you accept paternity." He lit up. And I've kept my promise still today. For *COEURS* (the original play is "Private Fears in Public Places") as well.

The big problem posed in adapting *Life of Riley* was this: how can a movie audience understand that there are four gardens that do not touch each other? I thus used Blutch's drawings, photographs of Yorkshire, with a few road shots so that people would understand that the gardens were sometimes as much as twenty kilometers apart. Hopefully, by mixing these three elements that don't go together –

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Blutch's drawings don't resemble Jacques Saulnier's sets, which don't look at all like the roads of Yorkshire – the audience grasps the notion of distance. I wanted freedom in making the film. Laurent Herbiet and I worked in a very special way. Herbiet is a magician at the computer. Hardly had I spoken a sentence that it was in the machine. Sometimes he had even typed what I would say before I said it. We thus took the original play and storyboarded it right away. For this phase of the work, I use little plastic figurines that represent the actors and move them around. They are often film characters brought back from my travels. I like them to be as anonymous as possible. It helps me a lot, I can do the breakdown at the same time as Herbiet suggests shortcuts and links between sequences. I made Ayckbourn laugh one day by saying to him, "I'm against cuts, but I'm for contractions." Jean-Marie Besset, whose work as an adapter and author I knew and admired, then took care of the translation and worked on the already breakdown English version. "AIMER, BOIRE ET CHANTER"? You take three normal couples, or what you'd call normal, whether they're very happy or very miserable. All it takes is a single event to perturb them, the arrival of George, and everything becomes hysterical. Yes, it's funny, but there are nevertheless moments when the shadow of death passes, to light music. Something fairly rare happened with this film: when it was finished, the editor, Hervé De Luze, and myself noticed that what we call the offcut bin – the place we throw offcuts into, the deleted scenes – was empty. Nothing had been cut, and everything had been shot. Yes, you can say it; we left no trash! It's true that there were a lot of sequence shots, scenes filmed in continuity. The actors were amazing, in fact. They'd get together and rehearse of their own accord outside the shooting schedule. That saved a huge amount of time.

What makes it still cinema, even though we used all sorts of theatrical artifices, down to replacing doors by painted backdrops that could be pulled aside? That's a real mystery. Of course, even if it worked in the film's favor, there was the issue of saving money. My approach was reinforced by taking a big leap back in time to Sacha Pitoëff and his wife. Every time they'd put on a play at the Théâtre des Mathurins, they were short of funds for the sets. They'd use old curtains and borrow old carpets and that way managed to suggest sumptuous interiors. I told Jacques Saulnier about that, saying, "If Sacha Pitoëff did it, you can do it too." He made a feeble protest, saying "Yes, but in the movies..." I said, "Well, we're going to try it."

– Alain Resnais

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## SABINE AZÉMA

### *Who is Kathryn?*

She's slightly hyper, excitable, always blaming somebody for something, pretty high-handed with people, and full of life—too full of life for the life she has. When she married Colin, she was most likely in love, but now it's humdrum. She has no children, but she feels a bit like an eternal teenager, never satisfied. Sexually, first and foremost. She drinks on the sly, and that proves that something is up. In reality, she's profoundly bored. To escape the confines of her existence, she loses herself in dreams and fantasies, and the ultimate dream is the notorious George. It has to be said that Kathryn is annoying most of the time, but I'm not scared of that. I go with it. I understand her. You have to be able to accept your character's flaws.

### *Her relationship with the others?*

And the others are wary of her, thinking, What's she going to come out with now? She can't keep her mouth shut, or keep a secret. Monica? She was married to George—unforgivable. Simeon? He doesn't interest her, any more than Jack does. As for Tamara, the two women are so different that they'll never get on. Kathryn rattles her, she's overbearing and “bossy,” as children would say. In fact, they all remind me of a bunch of children that have aged.

### *George ?*

I see my character's biography the way Alain described it... Born in York, raised by a single mother, not great at school but very sporty. A friend who goes rowing takes me to Manchester, where I take up rowing and much more besides. I work in a pub to get by and I party. It's the punk rock era and I start drinking heavily. My future husband collects clocks and I collect boyfriends. I always go for the best-looking. One evening, I meet George, who's at college in Manchester. Friendly, smooth, and extremely funny, an Alpha male. He's a redhead, tall, bulky, not handsome enough for me, not at all my type. But I'll soon change my mind.

### *Working with Alain Resnais?*

LIFE OF RILEY is maybe my tenth film with Alain Resnais. I've lost count. To see how it all started, we have to go back in time. I never dreamed of being an actor, but ever since I was knee high to a grasshopper, I've loved performing. At high school in Paris, I joined the drama group. I can still see myself leaning against a car, listening to the teacher Philippe Laudénbach, who was Pierre Fresnay's nephew, telling us that he had been in MURIEL, OR THE TIME OF RETURN, a film by an extraordinary man, Alain Resnais. I'd barely heard of Resnais and I rarely went to the movies. So, with a couple of girlfriends, I went to see MURIEL. That was the first time I was blown away in the cinema. I immediately sensed we were in the presence of grace, beauty, mystery and art. At that age, I couldn't define how or why, but I came out of the screening transformed. Had I had the slightest inkling of what would happen next... Alain called me maybe two weeks later about LIFE IS A BED OF ROSES. At the time, I'd been in a handful of films, no more. I couldn't help thinking that fortune was smiling on me and that I shouldn't pass it up. My recollection of that first shoot was feeling a strange blend of determination and timidity. But everything came together to put me at ease. After a take, I'd turn round and see Pierre Arditi giving me a thumbs-up. A thumbs-up from Pierre, no finer accolade! And Vittorio Gassman, in his red suit, who came to the set one day just to watch me. Everybody called me “kid,” and the kid gave it all she had. With Resnais, it was like setting off on a journey that would never end. And it has no end. Maybe, after all, we're the same age and we take the same pleasure in putting on a

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show together, over and over. I always have the same mental image: we're in a garden full of long grass, wild grass naturally, and he opens some rusty gates—we don't know where we are, we don't know where we're going, yet we arrive somewhere. Every time.

KATHRYN

They're not gaps, they're pauses.  
Pauses for laughs.

COLIN

Really?

KATHRYN

To leave room for the laughs.  
There'll be laughs. At least we  
hope so.

## **HIPPOLYTE GIRARDOT**

### *Who is Colin?*

Colin is a country doctor from a relatively humble background, who probably didn't get his degree from a major university. He has always lived in the rural north of England. He likes it there and has never thought of moving away. He started out working in a hospital and it was his reputation as a good physician, not his contacts that enabled him to set up on his own. His life is extremely humdrum. He and his wife Kathryn are childless. He doesn't want things to change, doesn't want the river to burst its banks. Colin is obsessed with time, or rather with clocks. Each one of his many clocks is linked to a family event, as if he were keeping his neurosis on a leash by focusing on an object. An object that is dysfunctional, of course. His obsession with repairing clocks is a way for him to assume, to hope, that if they were all on time, his life would be more harmonious and escape a slightly depressing routine.

### *His relationship with the others?*

When the idea of putting on a play was suggested, he was invited to join the group, much to the annoyance of his wife, who saw it as an opportunity to have fun without him and to go drinking without him keeping an eye on her. So he's not very good but flattered to have been asked to join in. He takes his work as an amateur player as seriously as his job as a doctor. It gives him a sense of entering his wife's world and being adopted by it. But when Jack comes up to him to talk about his wife, Tamara, whom he suspects of having an affair with George, Colin is deeply embarrassed by a man he hardly knows speaking so intimately to him. In fact, Colin's only intimacy is with Kathryn.

### *George?*

Although, as his doctor, I have seen him naked, George remains a mystery to me. Compared with him and his romantic lifestyle, I'm a lightweight. He is terribly English, a rangy figure and real Dandy, very subtle and totally potty. And always so elegant in his bespoke suits. He looks very decadent with his emaciated face and air of a little boy who's grown up too fast. That must be what appeals to women...

### *Working with Alain Resnais?*

The first time Alain Resnais contacted me was when he sent me the script of VOUS N'AVEZ ENCORE RIEN VU, in which the characters were named after the actors playing them. Delighted that Alain Resnais should think of me for a part, I opened it up and read, "The loathsome Girardot enters."

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Sure, I found the character of the impresario, loathsome, delightful, but it was very unnerving. When I met Alain, he said to me, “Ah! Girardot, I’ve wanted to work with you for years, and finally I have a part for you!” I dared to reply, “So you couldn’t find a loathsome character for me to play before?” Working with Alain Resnais is nothing like taking on a role for another director. Alain Resnais invites you into a world you don’t know. It’s as if there were a door that you go through, and reality is immediately different. The change is neither brutal nor obvious because the reality is that of a man who decided once and for all that it is the imaginary that guides our lives, not reality. I deeply believe Alain Resnais thinks that and passes it on. He is aware, even in his own body, of the brutality of reality. He passes it on, smoothly, naturally, to his actors. And that faith in the imaginary is a cause he defends. It’s not decorative — this isn’t Tim Burton. No, it’s intimate; it’s ethological. Alain Resnais doesn’t “direct” his actors. He thinks that you are responsible enough to take care of the character he has entrusted to you. After a take, he might say, “That was perhaps a little excessive.” Which doesn’t mean you went over the top, but simply that it went beyond what you had planned to tell. So, we all try to stay in the same scene, all together, with that unique sense of gaiety and belonging.

COLIN

I couldn’t live with a woman  
who laughs all day long.

KATHRYN

(falling in his arms)  
Thank you, Colin. You know how to  
talk to a woman!

COLIN

I wasn’t particularly cheerful  
as a young man.

KATHRYN

No, that’s true. That was one  
reason why I married you.

COLIN

Why else?

KATHRYN

Because you were never young, Colin.  
(They kiss each other)

## CAROLINE SILHOL

*Who is Tamara?*

When I got to know her, I really developed a feel for her. I’d fallen for Alan Ayckbourn’s “Life of Riley” the first time I saw it. I wanted to perform it on stage and wrote a French adaptation. That’s when Alain Resnais expressed a desire to make it into a film, so the theatre project was shelved with no regrets. Afterwards, Resnais said to me, “I’d like you to play Tamara.” “Of course,” I simply replied, “Ah! How wonderful!” Although, for the stage production I really wanted to play the other role, that of Kathryn, who is played by Sabine Azéma. I found Kathryn funny and cheeky, which Sabine captures magnificently. Tamara is a character I had to acclimatize to, but I think I came to terms with her thanks to Alain. First and foremost, Tamara is a kindly, compassionate woman, but woe betide you if you take



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advantage of her kindness! Jack, her husband, is probably not completely above board in his business dealings but, inexplicably, she loves him. He happily cheats on her and, like all unfaithful men, comes to his wife for consolation. It hurts, but she takes it with grace and humor. She did some acting when she was young, but when she was pregnant with Tilly; she gave up her career, which had never really threatened to take off. They moved back to Yorkshire and Tamara opened a small beauty salon, fuelled by her desire to spread happiness around her...

## *Her relationship with the others?*

She has a rather wry, indulgent view of the others. For example, she is sympathetic toward Kathryn, a slightly scatty woman and secret drinker who, above all, is no longer “intimate” with her husband, poor woman. Tamara is aware that everybody has their problems but she sticks by her motto, To be happy, keep your eyes shut, or half-shut at least. She’s never been “hot” for George, as my children would say, but playing on-stage lovers, even in amateur dramatics, can provoke unexpected attractions.

## *George?*

He’s nothing special. He has a bit of a belly, lets himself go and is unconcerned with his appearance. The hair he has left is permanently tousled and going grey. His charm is in his eyes. He has golden eyes that change color with the light and, yes, he has very beautiful hands.

## *Working with Alain Resnais?*

For Alain Resnais, what matters most is rhythm and style, which is nothing other than substance rising to the surface. On set, his breathing tells you if he approves or disapproves. “Disapproves” is too strong a word for it. Let’s just say, he makes an observation. What is astonishing is his capacity to communicate with the fewest words possible. Just the right word to put you on track, the word you were unwittingly waiting for. When he arrives in the morning, he gathers together everybody who’s in the first scene and says, “Okay, last night, it occurred to me — I wonder when he sleep — that we could — he describes the scene — but I thought that it might be better if...” It’s his way of giving us something to chew on. That’s it! He feeds us rather than forcing things on us. You don’t get butterflies with him because he doesn’t judge. He’s above that; he has no time to waste. To be honest, his gentle nature and courtesy are infectious. On the set of LIFE OF RILEY, I didn’t dare to tell him, but I called him “4G” — Gentle, Generous Genius and Gee he’s young!

TAMARA

Good trip?

JACK

The usual boring conference.

TAMARA

Uh

JACK

You get the picture.

TAMARA

Long way to go to get bored.

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## MICHEL VUILLERMOZ

### *Who is Jack?*

I think I know what he does for a living, but I won't tell you. What I can tell you is that Jack has money, a lot of money. He made it by the sweat of his brow. He is very well off. He wanted to move back to the big house in Yorkshire that he had his eye on ever since he was a boy. He married Tamara for love, of course. He loves her! But he has a mistress. That I can tell you because it's an open secret. Everybody knows. And he has a daughter, Tilly, who's about to turn 16. She's the light of his life. He has nothing against fine clothes and a flash car — the trappings of success. He likes having guests and showing that he has money. I won't tell you any more about Jack, it's too intimate and too complex.

### *His relationship with the others?*

I met Monica when she was having a love affair with George, but I'm telling you something you already know. On the other hand, I don't know Simeon, the new man in her life. Colin and Kathryn are more my wife's chums. They do amateur theatre productions together. We see quite a lot of them — they come for dinner after rehearsals. They're not close friends, let's say, just acquaintances. Tamara has always loved acting. It amuses her and keeps her busy. I try to take an interest, but I have to admit that it bores me absolutely — I'll say the word — shitless. George? Ah! George is different. I'm his oldest and closest friend. We met at school and we got on almost from the very start. I admired him. I was sure he'd become an adventurer, an explorer, a great reporter or a politician. And then, for some reason, he gave up and became a teacher. Tilly was in his class, in fact. What was he like as a boy? Very funny, even at primary school, he was a hit with the girls and that continued in secondary school. We never lost touch with each other. we regularly met up, especially when he was living with Monica. A little less regularly since then.

### *George ?*

Physically? He's a very ordinary guy, which is why his success with the fairer sex has always surprised me. He's anything but George Clooney. In France, they'd call him a Georges Dupont — regular George. Average height, balding, with a spare tire: a pretty unremarkable specimen. Except that women fall at his feet. Playing second fiddle to him always irritated me but now, you see, I can laugh about it.

### *Working with Alain Resnais?*

This is the fourth time it has been my good fortune to act in an Alain Resnais film, except that the first time, I never met him. It was for PRIVATE FEARS IN PUBLIC PLACES in 2006. I made a brief appearance on a TV screen in a religious program filmed by Bruno Podalydès. Then, before YOU AIN'T SEEN NOTHIN' YET, came WILD GRASS and the dumb-and-dumber duo of pretty irresistible police officers I formed with Mathieu Amalric. I recall one magical moment in the way Alain Resnais filmed us, in the interrogation with André Dussollier, using the zoom a lot. And he was looking on, laughing. Shooting with Alain Resnais is always fun. As he says, I shoot to see how it is shot. It's exactly that. He makes us perform to see how it's performed. And we try things that are well thought out and prepared, hoping that we don't come up short compared to the formal schemes devised for us, hoping we don't disappoint him. With Alain Resnais, we don't have this pesky notion of efficiency and the pressure of the shooting schedule: you have to get so many minutes of usable footage in the can, coverage and all that. It's just the opposite. We always seem to have time on our side. Time to capture the emotion, to capture life.

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JACK

Sixteen's a big one. Age of consent, after all.

TAMARA

I think she's jumped the gun there.

JACK

I don't understand. It's not what she told me.

TAMARA

Obviously.

## **SANDRINE KIBERLAIN**

### *Who is Monica?*

She's a teacher in a small town. With George, she had one of those magnificent love affairs that sweeps you away, and then dumps you by the wayside. And I think that's where she lost touch with herself. George has this power over women and people. At first, they feel appreciated; then he begins to take over their lives. When the film opens, Monica is in another relationship, with George's polar opposite. She loves Simeon, but wonders if maybe she moved in with him too soon. She constantly wrestles with these big issues. It's so new for her to feel someone watching her with a purely benevolent gaze. She even says, "He only wants what's best for me. He loves me and I love him back." But in the love him back, there's a slight misgiving. It had to be played between the lines and that was very interesting. Monica is one of those tall, gangly English women who have never quite grown out of adolescence. That's where the idea for the blond plait that slaps her back came from. Monica is a butterfly that flutters around and never seems to land anywhere.

### *Her relationship with the others?*

She's fragile, so she's not totally at ease. Suddenly, her cheeks flush: she's scared of opening her mouth, scared of something being taken away from her, scared that the others do it better. She's the youngest of the three women and she envies the others' maturity and self-confidence. In fact, the only thing that brings them together, that unites them, is George. The crucial question is which one of them did he love the most? She's his ex- wife, who should give her greater legitimacy, but as the film unfolds we realize that all the women, and indeed the men, can lay claim to a special place in George's life.

### *George?*

He's attractive and very virile. A tree. He's imposing with a booming voice that's slightly deceptive because it gives you a false sense of security. He's the kind of womanizer who has the ability to drive you crazy with words rather than deeds, and then run a mile when you're hooked. He can leave a room as quickly as he entered, but when he's gone his presence is still there. It leaves a hole.

### *Working with Alain Resnais?*

I'm the only member of the cast working with Alain Resnais for the first time. I wrote him a letter six years ago simply to tell him how much I admired his films and work. I never received a reply. One fine day, I was walking in the street with my daughter, near my house, and the producer Jean-Louis Livi

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came up to me and asked me out of the blue, “Can Alain Resnais call you?” Imagine my reaction. I was walking on air. I hurried home, the phone rang and I heard his youthful voice, “Hello Sandrine, this is my reply. Six years on. I want to offer you the part of Monica in my next film.” With that, the process whirred into action. The meeting. Alain Resnais cannot work with someone who doesn’t give back what he expects of that person. He called us together for a table-read. He wouldn’t start until he had found a little red plastic box. We found it. He put it on the table and explained, “It’s an English box. I hope I can work it because it reacts differently depending on where you press it.” We began to read and whenever there was a moment he liked, he pressed the little box and applause rang out. It was to let us know that he was happy with us. I was mesmerized.

Afterwards, Alain Resnais said, “I suggest that each of you writes the biography of your character giving a physical description and outlining his or her life so far.” It was a very hard assignment. You’re scared you won’t be up to it and scared of contradicting his conception of the character. What helped me was that instead of writing Monica’s biography, I drew it. From behind, as well. A silhouette with a long skirt, flowers, a hint of whimsy in her outfit. He agreed with it, except in one respect: “It seems to me that Monica wasn’t born where you have her being born.” To be on set with Alain Resnais is to be in one of his films, the actual film, a bit like in Woody Allen’s *PURPLE ROSE OF CAIRO*. You slip into an Alain Resnais film as you’re shooting it. The colors are different, the rhythm is different, the manner of speaking is different—softer and more courteous without being pompous. You are immersed in a different and unique atmosphere. You go to work as if heading out to a long-awaited date. Honestly, I want to steal the shot of me sneaking a smoke at the beginning. I think it’s a magnificent shot. I say to myself, Okay, at least I’ll have done that once in my life.

JACK

He can understand you need to  
put things on hold temporarily.

MONICA

What are you saying? You’re as  
crazy as George! On hold? It’s  
not a DVD player! Play, pause,  
freeze-frame, fast forward, rewind.  
That’s not life!

## **ANDRÉ DUSSOLLIER**

*Who is Simeon?*

A gentleman farmer. A widower who has fallen in love with the local primary school teacher. He’s a man of few words, who rarely lets his feelings show, but he is clearly infatuated with Monica. Their relationship is still very new, but there is a pervasive sense of trust. George’s irruption into the lives of these three couples, including his own (since Monica was once his wife) causes havoc and makes things increasingly awkward. Especially since poor Simeon has no idea how to approach the problem. It’s rare in a play for a character to have such a hard time finding the right words. He expresses himself through unexpected gestures and surprising impulses. He has quite a powerful physical presence, he is close to nature — and takes his frustrations out on nature when he gives a tree trunk an angry kicking! Human beings are much more of a mystery to him.

*His relationship with the others?*

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I don't really have a relationship with the other couples. Simeon is just Simeon, not very talkative or outgoing, slightly on one side. Guardian of the fragile citadel that is Monica. I wouldn't go as far as to say the others underestimate him, but it's not far off. He's not one of the gang. He doesn't rehearse the play with them and claims not to like theatre, with a line that I see as a wonderful gift from Alain Resnais: "No, me, I prefer the cinema." The others — businessman, doctor — are city slickers. Simeon is definitely a country boy. Actually, it's quite funny that Alain offered me the part because I'm extremely metropolitan. This is my first rural role! Perhaps it comes from me telling Alain about my life in his kitchen more than on a film set. I come from a rural background. My father was the only one of six brothers to come down from his mountain village "into town"!

## *George?*

Everybody has their own angle on George. But I guess, like Simeon, I blocked him out. George does not exist for me, or at least I sincerely hope not. He is the supreme example of what the others are— seductive, spinning right and left, elusive, saying one thing one minute and another the next. We know he's sick, but we don't know how sick. George's attitude and manner is alien to Simeon, and to me. I have never met him, although I must have bumped into him. But as Simeon has no way in to his world, if he ran into him, he didn't see him.

## *Working with Alain Resnais?*

For me, it's been thirty years and seven films now, since LIFE IS A BED OF ROSES in 1984. I have always wished for every actor to have the good fortune to work with Alain Resnais one day. It's a huge privilege to watch him creating and filming, and to establish a personal relationship. I was very moved to see Sandrine Kiberlain so touched to be chosen by him. Vittorio Gassman, when we were shooting LIFE IS A BED OF ROSES, said, "The first time you meet Alain Resnais is like entering a cathedral." Every time, it's a completely new adventure, adapting to the next movie to come off the production line of Alain's insatiable curiosity — for people and things, including the theatre of course. He recalls how, when he was very young, he saw Sacha Guitry at the Théâtre de la Madeleine, showing his documentary CEUX DE CHEZ NOUS. That was his first encounter with movies, in a theatre, with a man showing and talking about his film. With Alain, we enjoy the benefits of a theatrical process — which was frowned upon at the time of the Nouvelle Vague — that involves a lot of preparation and work before you start shooting, like the rehearsals for a play. When we arrive on set, after this period of gentle, calm, sustained, respectful preparation, we're ready. There are none of the collisions; tension and fumbling that are so often the rule. At the same time, when you're with someone who knows you so well, and who gives you the gift of another role, you have your back to the wall every time and you are ready to give your all to prove yourself worthy of his trust.

SIMEON

(shooting a trunk)

Bollocks and bloody buggery! I've  
broken my foot!

## **THE LITTLE MOLE**

The little mole that appears fleetingly popping out of its hole in LIFE OF RILEY? It has to do with my reading of the surrealists when I was a teenager. There was this idea that if an image came to you and still remained in mind three days later, you had to do something with it. I kept this advice in mind. The image of the mole came to me when Jean-Louis Livi commissioned me to do a film with Alan

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Ayckbourn's "Life of Riley". Because all my films are commissions. I have an excellent alibi: Igor Stravinsky apparently never wrote a note before having received a commission. So when Jean-Louis Livi talked to me about the play, spontaneously I said to him, "In any event, there will be a mole." He answered, "I sure hope so." And there you have it; the mole is there. But in no way should it be seen as any sort of symbol or message. Some ten years ago a critic at the New York Times had written a very funny article, saying, "Alain Resnais is criticized for not having an obsession, for never coming back to the same themes, for simply being an illustrator. That's not true: in his films, there's always a little critter running around."

Alain Resnais

*The very fine, richly documented and illustrated book that Jean-Luc Douin has just devoted to Alain Resnais (Éditions de la Martinière) contains some valuable and entertaining thematic sections. One of them is devoted to "Animals." The mole in LIFE OF RILEY did not make it in, but there are all the critters that abound in Alain Resnais' filmography. For instance there is the mouse that runs along the beach in I LOVE YOU I LOVE YOU, the mysterious cat at the end of WILD GRASS, the bestiary of MY AMERICAN UNCLE (turtle, frog, goldfish, puppy, wild boar, starfish, eel), the hedgehogs in PROVIDENCE, not forgetting the jellyfish in SAME OLD SONG.*