



LE JOLI MAI

THE LOVELY MONTH OF MAY

A film by Chris Marker & Pierre Lhomme
An Icarus Films Release

“Mr. Marker has a penetrating camera and a penetrating mind. Both are employed with a searching persistence in this film, dissecting Paris, dissecting the people who live in Paris.” —Vincent Canby, *The New York Times* (1966)

**North American Theatrical Premiere Engagement Sept. 13 at Film Forum, NYC;
Sept. 20 at Laemmle’s Playhouse 7 and Royal Theaters, Los Angeles;
Oct. 15 at Magic Lantern’s Carlton Cinema, Toronto;
Nov. 15 at Landmark’s Opera Plaza and Shattuck Cinemas, San Francisco;
Dec. 6 at Landmark’s Kendall Square, Boston; and more.**

1963, France, 145 mins. / 1.66:1 / B&W / DCP

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ABOUT THE FILM

Long unavailable in the U.S. and a major work in the oeuvre of filmmaker Chris Marker (1921-2012), *LE JOLI MAI* was awarded the International Critics Prize at the 1963 Cannes Film Festival and the "First Work" Prize at the 1963 Venice Film Festival. It premiered in North America in September 1963 at the first New York Film Festival.

This restoration of *LE JOLI MAI* premiered at the Cannes Film Festival on May 16, 2013, 50 years after the film first premiered there. It was created according to the wishes of Marker, supervised by the film's cinematographer and co-director, Pierre Lhomme (b. 1930). The film's music is by the Academy Award-winning composer Michel Legrand, French-language commentary is by renowned singer-actor Yves Montand, and the English-language commentary is by Academy Award-winning actress Simone Signoret.

LOG LINE

Chris Marker and Pierre Lhomme's *LE JOLI MAI (The Lovely Month of May)* is a portrait of Paris and Parisians during May 1962, the first springtime of peace after the ceasefire with Algeria and the first time in 23 years that France was not involved in any war.

SYNOPSIS

"A far-reaching meditation on the relationship between individual and society" (*Film Comment*), *LE JOLI MAI* is a portrait of Paris and Parisians during May 1962.

It is a film with several thousand actors including a poet, a student, an owl, a housewife, a stockbroker, a competitive dancer, two lovers, General de Gaulle and several cats.

Filmed just after the March ceasefire between France and Algeria, *LE JOLI MAI* documents Paris during a turning point in French history: the first time since 1939 that France was not involved in any war.

Part I, "A Prayer from the Eiffel Tower," documents personal attitudes and feelings around Paris. A salesman feels free only when he is driving his car, and then only if there is not too much traffic. A working-class mother of eight has just gotten the larger apartment that she had been wanting for years. The space capsule of American astronaut John Glenn is examined by a group of admiring children. Two investors talk about their careers and adventures. A couple who

have been in love since their teens discuss the possibility of eternal happiness. At a middle class wedding banquet, the guests are raucous while the bride is quiet, dignified and reserved.

Part II, "The Return of Fantomas," is an investigation of the political and social life of the city. Marker and Lhomme alternate between public events and private discussions: the former focusing on the Algerian situation, such as a funeral for people killed in Paris street demonstrations after the Algerian settlement. Meanwhile, the latter includes a conversation with two girls about the state of France; a meeting with a pair of engineers who describe the potential of the current technological revolution; a n African student who discusses his own response to the French and the Parisians' reaction to his skin color; a worker-priest forced to choose between the Church and his fellow workers; and an Algerian worker describing conflict he has experienced with native Frenchmen.

The film ends with sweeping views of Paris, the façades of its prisons, and the faces of its people as they struggle to make sense of their moment in history.

IN THE PRESS

"[*LE JOLI MAI* shows] a face of Paris whose truth and originality seduce us."
—*Le Monde (France)*

"A sincere, brilliant, clever and highly idiosyncratic essay."
—*Paris-Presse (France)*

"*LE JOLI MAI* takes its stand not only by the clarity of thought, but also by some of the most beautiful sequences ever shown at the [Venice Film] Festival."
—*Avanti (Italy)*

"*Cinéma vérité* gives us its first masterpiece."
—*Le Soir de Bruxelles (Belgium)*

"Chris Marker is an artist. He has something to say about the 'other France,' the France we don't see on the Champs-Élysées, and he says it simply and movingly." —Richard Roud, *The Guardian (UK)*

"It is through this dual image of Paris as a city of hope and despair, promise and chaos, liberation and imprisonment that the film serves, not only as an encapsulated document of the spirit of the times, but also a prescient prefiguration of the social turmoil—and ideological revolution—to come."
—*Strictly Film School*

Excerpted from an article in *The New York Times*
By Vincent Canby
June 10, 1966

Chris Marker is one of France's more gifted filmmakers and a man whose work has been seen in the United States only on rare occasions—film festivals and the like. Therefore those interested in the motion-picture art will be grateful [for the opportunity to see] his documentary *Le Joli Mai*.

Mr. Marker has a penetrating camera and a penetrating mind. Both are employed with a searching persistence in this film, dissecting Paris, dissecting the people who live in Paris.

It is not the tourist's Paris or even the Parisian's Paris, but rather the Paris of the social worker, the newspaperman, the policeman, the man whose work takes him down the forbidding alleyways, the menacing dead-end streets and who asks questions, endlessly asks questions, questions, questions.

Mr. Marker will approach a clothing salesman in front of his shop and, while a handheld camera explores every angle of the man's face, every item of his clothing, the man will be asked blunt questions about life—what gives him pleasure, what are his difficulties, what are his ambitions, what is life all about?

The light of Paris is captured as well as it has ever been captured on film—a gloomy, oppressive, forbidding light that every now and again becomes a lovely light, in fact the loveliest light in the world.

There are some enthusiasts of France's *cinéma-vérité* movement who would have us believe that theirs is a radically new force in the motion-picture art. That is not true. Many of the techniques employed, many of the subjects explored, stem from the documentaries of an earlier day, particularly those made in the United States in the nineteen thirties.

But what can be said is that Mr. Marker's gifts as a filmmaker are formidable and that, in the opinion of this corner, he is the best of the French school practicing the documentary art at the present time.

[There] is much in this film that a motion-picture enthusiast will want to see, and Mr. Marker's artistry is well deserving of exposure on these shores. Besides, who is there who can resist Paris, Paris in May and a Paris that one has not seen before?

IN LITERATURE

“In his portrait of Paris, *LE JOLI MAI*, [Marker] focused not on a limited group, as Rouch had done, but on a broad social and political spectrum.”

—Erik Barnouw, Documentary

“The memory of the war haunts the present time of filming...and this memory emerges in the film as part of the unconscious of everyday life that its interrogative style seeks to bring out.” —Sarah Cooper, Image & Narrative

“For all the anxieties and acts of violence it registers, *LE JOLI MAI* affirms the hopes of its most generous characters by adopting their clear-sightedness as its own method.” —Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Documentary Film

“Personal thoughts are firmly and evocatively placed within a wider socio-political context...Illuminating and funny.” —Gilbert Adair, Time Out Film Guide

“An exemplary turn in the direct cinema genre that Marker helped pioneer... it cannot finally commit to the simple justice of leaving an ethnographic record of how we lived, but must set this against the reflexive meditations of the cinematic apparatus.” —Michael Atkinson, Exile Cinema“

“An expansive, multi-vocal enquiry into the complexity of contemporary France using the new methods of direct cinema... As much as Marker (and Lhomme) reserve their right to use framing, editing, and commentary to convey their opinions and attitudes toward the people who feature in *LE JOLI MAI*, the film is equally scrupulous in seeking to preserve the integrity and singularity of each participant, the circumstances they live in and the way they choose to express themselves.” —Catherine Lupton, Chris Marker: Memories of the Future

CHRIS MARKER BIOGRAPY

Born Christian François Bouche-Villeneuve on July 29, 1921 in Neuilly-sur-Seine, France, **Chris Marker** was a cinematic essayist and audio-visual poet. After World War II, he worked as a writer, publishing his first book, *Le coeur net*, in 1949. In the 1950s he turned to documentary filmmaking; among his many significant works from this period are *Letter from Siberia*, *Cuba Si!*, *La Jetée* and *Le Joli Mai*. In the 1960s and 1970s, Marker was involved with SLON, a filmmaking collective dedicated to activist productions. He began making films under his own name again in 1977 with *A Grin Without A Cat*. During the '80s and '90s, Marker's work included several films about fellow filmmakers, including *One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich* (1999), an homage to his friend Andrei Tarkovsky. He also explored video and computer-generated imagery with a continued emphasis on the intersection between personal and political themes in films such as *The Case of the Grinning Cat*. An original voice in world cinema for over 50 years, Marker passed away on his 91st birthday, July 29, 2012.

Selected Filmography

La Jetée (1962)
Le Joli Mai (1963)*
The Sixth Side of the Pentagon (1967) *
A bientôt, j'espère (Be Seeing You) (1968) *
Three Cheers for the Whale (1972) *
The Embassy (1973) *
A Grin Without a Cat (1977) *
Sans Soleil (1982)
The Last Bolshevik (1993) *
Chris Marker's Bestiary (1994) *
One Day in the Life of Andrei Arsenevich (1999) *
Remembrance of Things to Come (2001) *
The Case of the Grinning Cat (2004) *

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PIERRE LHOMME BIOGRAPY

Born on April 5, 1930 in Boulogne-sur-Seine, France, Pierre Lhomme is a cinematographer. He has photographed films for many of the most important filmmakers in the last fifty years including Marguerite Duras, Jean Eustache, Jean-Pierre Melville and Robert Bresson. Lhomme has won the César Award for Best Photography twice: first for *Camille Claudel*, directed by Bruno Nuytten (1988), and then for *Cyrano de Bergerac*, directed by Jean-Paul Rappeneau (1990). He has also been nominated for that award five additional times: for *Lovers Like Us* (1975), directed by Jean-Paul Rappeneau; *The Flesh of the Orchid* (1974), directed by Patrice Chéreau; *This Sweet Sickness* (1977), directed by Claude Miller; *Judith Therpauve* (1979), directed by Patrice Chéreau; and *Deadly Circuit* (1982), directed by Claude Miller). He currently lives in Paris and Provence.

Selected Filmography

<i>Le Combat dans l'île</i> (Alain Cavalier, 1962)	<i>A Dirty Story</i> (Jean Eustache, 1977)
<i>Les métamorphoses du paysage</i> (Eric Rohmer, 1964)	<i>Judith Therpauve</i> (Patrice Chéreau, 1979)
<i>King of Hearts</i> (Philippe de Broca, 1966)	<i>Aurélia Steiner</i> (Marguerite Duras, 1979)
<i>Mister Freedom</i> (William Klein, 1968)	<i>Le Navire Night</i> (Marguerite Duras, 1979)
<i>Army of Shadows</i> (Jean-Pierre Melville (1969)	<i>Les Mains negatives</i> (Marguerite Duras, 1979)
<i>Four Nights of a Dreamer</i> (Robert Bresson, 1971)	<i>La Fille prodigue</i> (Jacques Doillon, 1980)
<i>Someone Behind the Door</i> (Nicolas Gessner, 1971)	<i>Quartet</i> (James Ivory, 1981)
<i>Le Sex Shop</i> (Claude Berri, 1972)	<i>Deadly Circuit</i> (Claude Miller, 1982)
<i>The Mother and the Whore</i> (Jean Eustache, 1973)	<i>Maurice</i> (James Ivory, 1987)
<i>The Flesh of the Orchid</i> (Patrice Chéreau, 1974)	<i>Camille Claudel</i> (Bruno Nuytten, 1988)
<i>Lovers Like Us</i> (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1975)	<i>Cyrano de Bergerac</i> (Jean-Paul Rappeneau, 1990)
<i>Les Enfants du placard</i> (Benoît Jacquot, 1976)	<i>Tell Him I Love Him</i> (Claude Miller, 1993)
<i>This Sweet Sickness</i> (Claude Miller, 1977)	<i>The Voyager</i> (Volker Schlöndorff, 1991)
	<i>Les Palmes de Monsieur Schutz</i> (Claude Pinoteau, 1997)
	<i>Cotton Mary</i> (Ismail Merchant, 1999)
	<i>Le Divorce</i> (James Ivory, 2003)

NOTE OF INTENTION

Paris is not a subject. It cannot be explained, nor discovered by anyone. It has no point of view of itself. If it has keys, it has thrown them in the Seine. Who will find them again?

Those who have tried—those who have plunged into its placid waters and used what they found therein to make thousands of songs and poems, books and films, photos or speeches, those are the subjects. Or the cases. They looked at Paris and identified with it. Paris is the subject of a tale as hackneyed and legendary as Cinderella's slipper. No one can boast of having owned it; no one can boast of having worn it.

Better to await Paris patiently, and observe it without seeking to surprise it. It is a constant spectacle. A great spectacle which unfurls in a confused and nonchalant manner, like supple tragedy mixed with farce. Shapeless masks move about in the amphitheater—symbolic characters, inflated with smoke or hard like marble, which sometimes come to brush past the rows of seats, prancing or getting lost in the pandemonium—we recognize, on the way, the most familiar myths of the Parisians of 1962: the television, the automobile, sports, religion, prospective, Communism, cooking, the betting shop, animals (cats or those who recently avoided the slaughterhouse), housing, the weekend, drugs and their (always sad) heroes, the bouncers, the movie stars. And so many others. Around these characters, which newspapers put front and center, or harpoon to oust them, endlessly intervenes, commenting on the myths, or shaking them up, the chorus of antiquity: the people of Paris.

What do they say? We cannot stick a microphone in every mouth; we'd hear nothing. Those who have tried to listen, from afar, to the din of such different voices sometimes thought that Paris was mute. But it speaks.

In any event, in this film we'd like to try hard to hear it. Yet who do we choose from among the millions of Parisians? Of course, it's possible to make a list of its different professional categories, and give a voice to a representative from each of them. But proceeding this way would be arbitrary. Although no more so than sticking to one representative from each social category, trying to select "typical" characters, or deciding that only workers, or artists, or civil servants, or typists are "significant". For this film, we too had to make a choice, and our list is no more or less objective than any other (and certainly not exhaustive). What we sought was to show, alongside those who roll around as they please, chance and solitude: men and women integrated as much as possible in their social milieu and aware of what they would like to make of their lives.

You'll say this is biased, and that it risks casting things in a distorted light. The only way to correct the vision, and bring it into focus will be never to solicit answers, and to accept them even when they will call the bias into question. *Joli Mai* will be a skipping stone of a film. The writers will not be those launching the questions on the water of Paris: we'll see how the pebbles land and how far they go.

How do we raise these questions? The process will involve, as much as possible, indirect questions from people calling less for an answer than for a reflection, a chat or a digression. Questions—images. For example: Who hasn't recently heard about the ocean liner "France"? Its launch, its description, its performance, and its style fill newspapers and screens. We've discovered it as a whole, both details and organization. Does this boat mimic our reality, our city? And what if Paris were that boat? Would you love it? Is that how you would have designed it? Why? In short, is "France" is a test, a mirror of public desire?

There is one question that the writers wanted to ask themselves. In 25 or 30 years, what will those who allude to the 1960s have retained? The 1900s or 1925s—they've left their exegetes—those un-consoled at having lost them—Picasso's wash-house, flappers, surrealism, trends, Miss Chanel, bicycles, Montparnasse, suffragettes and De Dion-Boutons. And Charlot, laughter to tears, the stable Franc, suicides, Art Deco, illusions...

What will we fish out from our own years? Maybe something completely different than what we see as being most forward thinking now, this film *Le Joli Mai* would like to offer itself up as a petri dish for the future's fishers of the past. It will be up to them to sort out what truly made its mark and what was merely flotsam.

We have chosen to focus this film around May 1962 because that May is simultaneously the present, the spring and the event in Paris. The month of May begins with a celebration—May Day—and ends with another one—Ascension. Between them there are still others, the third Thursday of Lent, the Feast of Joan of Arc, and Mother's Day, not to mention the elections, certain major film galas and the final match of the French soccer cup. It's a lot for a city that some people accuse of being cold, difficult, both solitary and *au courant*. It's a lot and it is, for our purposes, an ideal time....

AN INTERVIEW WITH **PIERRE LHOMME**

By Jean-Michel Frodon
February 19, 2013

JEAN-MICHEL FRODON: *When Chris Marker decided to devote a film to May 1962, no one could know what precisely would happen during that month.*

PIERRE LHOMME: That's true; it was part intuition, part bet. Yet we were in the midst of a period that was full of events; at that very moment the agreement that would give Algeria its independence was being finalized. Even if no one could know that the Evian Accords would be signed on March 18, we did know it was coming in the near future. That signing and the referendum validating the Accords in April allowed Chris to speak of a first springtime of peace. Until then, everything after the Second World War had been marked by decolonization conflicts. Also, the month of May is often rich with events, so clearly that month was not chosen at random...Chris had written a "Note of Intention," which was supposed to be used to get financial support from the CNC. There, we find these magnificent words: "This film would like to offer itself as a petri dish for the future's fishers of the past. It will be up to them to sort between what truly makes its mark, and what will have merely been flotsam."

How did you become involved with the project?

At the very end of 1961, I got a telephone call from Chris Marker. We knew one another a little; I think it was primarily because I had worked a lot with Ghislain Cloquet, who himself had worked a lot with Chris. Chris must have asked Cloquet who he thought would be well-suited to work flexibly and with a handheld camera. It turns out that even though I was a head cameraman, I'd always really loved working more informally. We talked about how he wanted to make this film right away.

What were the principles that guided the filming?

Modesty was the essential principle we adhered to when it came to interviewing people. The only precedent we found was *Cinq Colonnes à la Une*, the television news program, which had some amazing elements. For us, it was a matter of avoiding the sort of psychodrama that the camera almost always triggers. We needed modesty, and a non-aggressive camera and microphone. Later, in a beautiful piece that appeared under the title "Passionate Objectivity" (published by Jeune Cinéma in 1964), Chris said: "We have forbidden ourselves to make decisions for people or laying out traps for them." We were very suspicious of the picturesque and the sensational.

How was your filming method new?

It was the first time we could record with direct sound. Sound had been “freed” for some years already thanks to the arrival of new tape recorders, Perfectones then Nagra’s, but image itself had not been liberated: cameras were much too heavy and noisy, we called them sewing machines. And images and sounds were not synchronized. That was the case in France, anyway; the Americans were ahead, Richard Leacock with *Primary*, the Maysles Brothers, and Michel Brault in Canada had begun to explore these new possibilities. They had managed to synchronize camera and tape recorder with a tuning watch. Although for *Le Joli Mai*, Antoine Bonfanti (the sound engineer) and I were connected to cables, a real tangle in the streets, on the sidewalks... At that time, the major discovery for a young cameraman like me concerned the importance of sound. I could no longer use my camera in the same way, so it wasn’t long before I asked Bonfanti for a headset to listen to what he was recording. Yet another cable...I realized that the cameraman had to be all ears, and the sound man all eyes.

How did you decide which people to interview?

The principle was complete freedom. There were very few of us—Chris, Antoine, my assistant Etienne Becker, Pierre Grunstein and me. We strolled around and when we saw someone who seemed interesting we went to see them. Chris had also located certain people in advance, and those people were filmed in a more planned-out way. You really feel it in the second part, “Return of Fantomas”: the worker-priest, the young Algerian worker, the Dahomean student... But then there were chance encounters, which we had to be really open to. The mason who’s at the beginning of the film was the first person we interviewed. We didn’t even know if his shop was next to the production location on rue Mouffetard. Filming this first conversation, I understood that what we were establishing could bring us very far. For the first time, we had 16mm film stock that could record for longer than 10 minutes at a time. And reloading was very quick; I always had refills. We don’t think twice about it now, but at the time this was a real revolution in the possibilities for fly-on-the-wall filming.

Were you also using a new camera?

Yes, it was a model from Coutant, the KMT. There were only two of them; [Jean] Rouch had the other for *Chronicle of a Summer*. They belonged to the Research Department of the ORTF. They were lost. Their main innovations had to do with lightness, low noise and the ability to synch with a tape recorder.

How did you perceive what you were seeing and hearing during these conversations?

We went from surprise to surprise, Chris and the others as much as me. We set off to discover Parisians, and what we discovered astounded us. At the time, laypeople were even less visible than they are today. We were not expecting what they said, nor the manner in which they said it—they were surprisingly direct and sincere, and they didn't try to seduce the camera. Many other visions than those we were expecting emerged.

The deadly events in Charonne on February 8, 1962 and the major demonstration in response on February 13 burst into the project.

Those are the only sequences that were not filmed in May. I did not film them; the images of the demonstration are news footage, and another cameraman was at the demonstration on the February 13.

How did you become not only the film's chief cameraman but its co-director?

That was the result of Chris' integrity. After spending hundreds of hours on the dailies during editing, he came to the conclusion that the film was also the result of his cameraman's work. He decided all alone to add me as co-director; it was not at all planned and it did not appear in the contract. When I came to see the first distribution print, at the Panthéon theater, I discovered on the screen that I had become co-director. You can imagine my emotion....I still feel it today. That affected my entire approach; after having worked with a man of that quality, you become more demanding of others.

To what extent were the questions asked in the film prepared in advance?

There were some initial questions, like the one about the nature of happiness, which aimed to understand the relationship between people and events and their perception of what's happening in the world. But we always proceeded gently. We were accompanied by two interviewers and friends, Henri Belly and Henri Crespi. When the camera rolled, Chris stayed a little off to the side, but he listened to everything and often came over often to get involved. Above all, we had to be responsive and avoid getting stuck on the planned questions; we had to respond to the honesty people showed us. The interviews were never cut up in the editing, which always respects their full remarks.

How much of what was filmed do we see in Le Joli Mai?

Very little. There were more than 50 hours of dailies. While editing, Chris reached a version that did what he wanted to accomplish—and it was seven hours long.

This version was only screened once. Chris would have liked to be able to continue to screen it, but it clashed with all of the common distribution practices. We needed to cut it a lot in order for it to be shown in theaters.

The unedited dailies were destroyed, very sadly. For example, we spent a whole day filming in a cab—with Bonfanti in the trunk and me next to the driver, a person we'd heard was loquacious, curious and a good talker. We filmed with all the people who got into the cab. Chris, who was not in the car, had been thrilled when he'd discovered the dailies. There was enough to make an entire film; we had been fortunate to meet about a dozen terrific characters.

How did the cat shots come into being?

That May, there happened to be a feline beauty competition. We asked a colleague to go and take cat shots. By this time, Chris already had a unique relationship with cats; for him, their gazes held wisdom and freedom. I knew it, and during the interviews, every time a cat came by, I filmed it. Although an enormous amount of work was needed to cut the film down to its current length, he never would have removed the cat shots.

Why was Yves Montand chosen to do the French voiceover?

The childhood friendship between Simone Signoret and Chris had resulted in [her husband] Montand also becoming a close friend. They were very tightknit. Later, in 1974, we made a film together that I love so much, *La Solitude du chanteur de fond* [The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Singer], where Chris filmed Montand at his house, practicing, and at a concert. It's a little gem! Especially the editing. In *Le Joli Mai*, Montand's voice lends an intimacy and simplicity to the text, like a folk song. When he recites Giraudoux' *La Prière sur la Tour Eiffel*, the contrast with Chris' voice is very clear.

How did Michel Legrand compose the music?

During a session at the Cinémathèque Française in December 2012, we presented the film together, Michel Legrand and me. On that occasion, he affirmed that at the time, Chris had given him instructions about the sequences and lengths, but that he'd never seen the film. Not then, nor since. I don't know what part of this story is legend; in any case, the music fits precisely. Even during the nightclub dance scene, the night of the Salan trial, the music is by Legrand. It was impossible to record original music given our filming conditions so it was added afterwards.

How did you do the restoration?

Thanks to financing from the CNC, it was possible to complete this restoration at the same time that we made a transfer to a good quality digital format on 2K. That's the master format from which we will make the DCPs for theatrical releases and the HDCams for home video releasing. But I didn't want to erase all traces of time, what I call "the wrinkles." The image was not completely cleaned or aseptized, as is too often done now. We can keep imperfections in the filming, development, accidents, as long as it does not harm the original vision. The people at the Mikros laboratory worked from the original 16mm reversal film, which was in much better condition than the 35mm prints that were struck later. But we also needed to establish a "final cut"—which, to tell you the truth, does not exist. Originally, the film was released in a hurry in order to comply with the dates scheduled with exhibitors. As soon as it came out, Chris began making cuts. In the version that is distributed today, I have made, per his wishes, some cuts that we had talked about and that he didn't have time to make himself. Besides, the Service des Archives du Film [film archive] has a restored print that is the same as the film that was released in 1963, the "long version," geared towards historians, researchers and curious filmgoers.



ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Interview from the website for the Association Française des Directeurs de la Photographie Cinématographique (AFC) [French Association of Cinematographers]

By Jean-Noël Ferragut, AFC

May 15, 2013

On the occasion of the selection of Chris Marker and Pierre Lhomme's *Le Joli Mai*, photographed by Pierre Lhomme, AFC, for the Cannes Film Festival's "Cannes Classics" program, we asked François-Régis Viaud, who supervised the restoration with Pierre Lhomme, to give us the details on the Mikros Image laboratory team's restoration on the film.

Jean-Noël Ferragut: In what state did you find the material on which the restoration work was based?

François-Régis Viaud: When an application was being prepared for support from the CNC [French National Center for Cinema and the Animated Image], our only references were the inspection reports that the AFF [French Film Archives] had provided and a 35mm blow-up used as a negative, from the 2009 restoration, in which two cuts had been made at Chris Marker's request: one shot in the first part and a series of shots in the second part, the famous 17-minute cut.

After doing scan tests on the 35mm material, a very significant difference in quality and definition emerged between the scenes shot on 35mm and the majority of the footage, which was on 16mm reversal. A screening at Max Linder [Panorama Theater] of the initial tests with DCP confirmed our desire to seek out other sources. To make the general quality of the image consistent, we decided to return to the best quality sources. We returned to the AFF, and found the original reversal positives on uncut 16mm. These new materials proved to be of excellent quality and we were therefore able to rediscover the original uncropped and uncut image.

For Mikros Image, what were the main stages of this task?

First, we scanned in all of the images. Due to the condition of the 16mm material and the fragility of the splices, we were unable to wipe it without risking damage to the material. The original 16mm material, which corresponded to an initial edit of the rushes, forced us, in addition to many traditional restoration steps, to digitally recreate a complete match of the film according to the 2009 version,

which Chris Marker had re-edited. We redid the editing and comprehensive framing of the film on Avid.

Then we were finally able to begin digitally restoring the image. We applied an initial, very slight stabilization adjustment, then we corrected the deformations and instabilities due to the splices. More than 300 hours were needed to erase the main dust specks. Certain restoration choices were informed by a desire to let time leave its mark on this documentary film, such as the scratch that remain in the stock market scenes or even the central scratch and other scratches in the lovers' scene on the Pont de Neuilly.

The color correction was done with Lustre projection. This very detailed work allowed us to restore brilliant light back to the Paris shots filmed on 35mm, while perfectly balancing them with the shots filmed on 16mm reversal, which tended to be darker.

For the sound restoration, we had different sources: optical 16mm, optical 35mm, and magnetic sound from 1-inch video. We discovered that the international version on magnetic 35 had been destroyed by vinegar syndrome. We scanned all of material we had. During the restoration, we received a digital print of the original film soundtrack which contained four good quality original titles, including the song by Yves Montand.

One of the most important features of this documentary was that the sound synchronized with the camera's imagery—technology which, at the time of filming, was quite new. The direct sound, which comprises the large majority of the film, was frequently mixed with the surrounding hubbub. In cramped rooms, camera noise was ever-present. It was difficult to hear the dialogue and very hard to understand what was being said. It was therefore necessary to reedit all the questions and answers wherever possible, minimizing the constant background noise.

Once that work was finished, we remixed the final sound, incorporating the original music for the song that marks the separation between the two halves of the film. The music in the final credits, "which perhaps never existed," was unfortunately never found again; we had to put back in the original sound from the magnetic print.

How did you work with Pierre Lhomme and did he end up changing decisions he had made when the film first came out?

The collaboration with Pierre was magical; his complete involvement and energy had a galvanizing effect on this project. Because of health issues that he had had during the initial edit, Pierre had never seen the original footage he

had shot on 16mm. So we rediscovered the original wide frames, as well as a dozen unedited shots which will, I hope, be included in a future release (perhaps as bonus features on the home video DVD). The image and sound benefited from his advice, his ear, and his knowledge and mastery of restoration tools. We all followed Pierre and his camera through Paris in May 1962; it's an unforgettable experience...

François-Régis Viaud is Director of Development and Production Monitoring Assets, Restoration and Mastering at Mikros image.

Some clarifications provided by Pierre Lhomme:

- The 35mm images were shot in Cameflex; for silent shots, they were done with a 1.66 matte.
- The 16mm images are full frame with 1.66 marking in the reflex viewfinder of the Berthiot Pan-Cinor 17-85 mm SOM zoom, negative enlarged to 35mm – 1.66.
- The zoom viewfinder was mounted on the right side of the camera—a dream for a true lefty!
- For the 10mm, we had adapted the viewfinder to the Paillard parallax, an arguable 1.66 marking!
- Jean César Chiabaut had, with Etienne Becker—the chief mechanic, instinctive timekeeper, cable-hanger, etc.—made us a supple blimp, “free of charge,” which KMT really needed ...
- No inopportune degrading, with the exception of two (or three?) overexposed shots.
- Working at Mikros was a real pleasure: listening, quality dialogue. With Sébastien Mingam, the timer, we moved on to Jean-Paul Rappeneau's *La Vie de château* and Philippe de Broca's *Le Magnifique*.
I hope to work with the Mikros people again soon.

P.S. The original calibration in 1962 was discussed on the phone—I was at a sanatorium in the Haute-Savoie with François Siniatecki, a friend and a timer at Eclair.

FILM CREDITS

Original title:	<i>Le Joli Mai</i>
English title:	<i>The Lovely Month of May</i>
Country:	France
Year:	1963
Directed by:	Chris Marker and Pierre Lhomme
Written by:	Catherine Varlin
Narration written by:	Chris Marker
Photography:	Pierre Lhomme
Editor:	Eva Zora
Music:	Michel Legrand
Sound:	Antoine Bonfanti
English narration:	Simone Signoret
French narration:	Yves Montand
Executive Producer	Gisèle Rébillon
Producer:	André Heinrich
Running time:	145 minutes
Aspect ratio:	1.66
Image	Black and white
Sound	Mono
Language:	English and French with English subtitles
Leading players:	The people of Paris
Laboratory	Mikros Image France
Produced by	La Sofra

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