

Jacquot de Nantes

(aka: "Jacquot")

France : 1991 : dir. Agnès Varda :

: 118 min

prod: : scr: : dir.ph.:

[boys / girls](#)

Philippe Maron; Edouard Joubaud; Laurent Monnier; Brigitte de Villepoix

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Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide
2001 review:

"Deeply moving chronicle of the sum of a man's life, as Varda creates a portrait of her late husband, French film-maker Jacques Demy. Varda cuts from interviews with Demy (lovingly

photographed in extreme close-ups), to clips from his films, to the re-created story of young "Jacquot" growing up in Nantes during the 1940s and developing a passion for cinema. A heartfelt valentine from one life partner to another. Released in the US in 1993 as "JACQUOT". Varda has since directed several other celluloid tributes to Demy. ***1/2 "

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Bloomsbury Foreign Film Guide", "The Critics' Film Guide", "TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995", "Variety Movie Guide 1993", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

As a portrait of a film-maker's self-confessed "happy childhood", one would like to feel warmer towards this French counterpart of John Boorman's "**HOPE AND GLORY**". It has several pleasant moments and few disagreeable characters, but the editing style consciously chosen by Varda creates a choppy effect, flashing back and forth between fragments of Demy's actual boyhood and clips – predominantly musical clips – from his later films that somehow echo these situations and minor incidents, though not always in a very significant way. His films will be familiar to French audiences of course, but few if any of them to a general English-speaking world. We recognise Catherine Deneuve, and perhaps other French stars, but these clips do not serve as a familiar point of reference, which the film rather takes for granted. Also, though Demy grew up through the war, German occupation, and was several times evacuated to relatives in the country, his story is remarkably free of drama or tragedy. His family and friends survive World War II unscathed, and although in interview he describes the trauma of emerging from a bomb shelter after intensive (allied) bombing of Nantes to find the streets littered with the dead and dying, an experience which left him with a lifelong horror of violence, even this incident is circumvented on the screen.

Many fine European films (fewer English language ones) have offered us uneventful studies of the important minutiae of childhood, where drama is secondary to portraiture, but studies of that kind typically require a slower pace, the camera quietly watching the child or children intent on their own business. Varda's buffet style of editing moves on too quickly for the gentle pace of life she's trying to convey. The film skips randomly between colour and black and white, not (as in "if...") for reasons of economy, and not (as in the excellent "**HEIMAT**") to highlight moments of special emotional importance, but simply to make the patchwork more interesting. Small incidents and large are given equal weight, so that we remain strangely detached from it all, waiting for some family crisis to ratchet the film up a gear, a crisis which never comes.

The connecting thread which emerges is Demy's fondness for the puppet theatre, for live theatre, and ultimately for cinema, at each stage applying his creative energies to imitate the performances he's seen. So he builds his own puppet theatre, acquires a hand-wound film projector and makes his first foray into cinema by scraping the emulsion off an old Chaplin silent and drawing a crude animation onto the celluloid; he exchanges his toys for a basic cine camera in a pawn shop and sets about directing a tale of gypsy abduction, but the film returns from the processors over-exposed and completely blank; he commandeers an attic in his father's garage and converts this into his own animation studio, building the cut-out figures and sets himself, and laboriously composing a film in stop-motion. I was similarly fascinated with cinema at the same age, bought my own camera and projector, toyed with animation etc, and so I recognise only too well Jacquot's yearnings to be a film-maker, yet we never become sufficiently involved with him as a person to be infected by his passion. He is a quiet boy, intent on his hobby in the attic, but not suffering as much for his art as the film implies. His family, neither harrowingly poor nor comfortable, are as indulgent and supportive of his passion as one could reasonably expect, and though his father insists he go to "technical college" to learn the manual skills of a metalworker, spelling years of purgatory for his son, the moment he is persuaded by someone in the field that the boy has genuine talent as a cineaste, he agrees to send him to Paris to study at the school of cinematography.

In short, this is a childhood without moments of great pain or great rapture, with no memorable adult characters met along the way, with no schooling at all (on screen at any rate) and no moments of devilry with friends or his younger brother Yves, aside from the statutory *you show me yours, I'll show you mine* incident with a small girl above the garage. Strangely, we never even see Jacquot at the cinema, but only queuing outside it, returning from it, or discussing Disney's "SNOW WHITE" with schoolfriends. It does not compare well, in that sense, with "NUOVO CINEMA PARADISO", which was at pains to recapture the thrill of cinemagoing for a small village boy who would later become a famous director.

See also "**BADKONAK-E SEFID**" and "**BASHU**" - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.