

THE ACCIDENTAL HEARTTHROB

Film3Sixty sits down with Romain Duris to discuss fame, painting and his two new films, **Chinese Puzzle** and **Mood Indigo**

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Romain Duris first burst onto the international scene in Jacques Audiard's superb *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* (2005) as the thuggish enforcer with a passion for classical music. Duris' kinetic, wrenching performance deservedly put him on the map, although he was a star in France way before that. But while the 39-year-old Frenchman has further boosted his profile with commercial Gallic fare such as *Heartbreaker* (2010) and *Populaire* (2012), he's not out to please anyone but himself. As he explains to Film3Sixty when we meet up in Paris, he's not one of those career-minded actors who will do anything to land a role, and, in fact, tends to work with the same directors over and over. He's had repeat experiences with Christophe Honoré and Olivier Dahan, although it's Cedric Klapisch for whom Duris has been a kind of muse. *Chinese Puzzle* is their seventh collaboration, and the third chapter in a popular Klapisch trilogy that began with *L'Auberge Espagnole* (2002), a comedy-drama about a multinational group of students in Barcelona, before reuniting them for a wedding three years later in *Russian Dolls*. *Chinese Puzzle* picks up their stories eight years down the line as Duris' Xavier, now a writer in search of inspiration, follows his ex Wendy

(Kelly Reilly) to New York because he can't bear being apart from their two children. Cecile De France and Audrey Tautou are also back in the frame as, respectively, Xavier's lesbian best friend Isabelle and another former flame, Martine. Sham marriages, torrid affairs and romantic entanglements ensue in Chinatown; the actors are all having fun, and it's an endearing conclusion to the trilogy. Later this summer, Duris can also be seen in the latest fevered extravaganza from Michel Gondry, *Mood Indigo* (an adaptation of Boris Vian's novel *L'Écume Des Jours*), in which the actor plays a Duke Ellington obsessed inventor who falls in love with a woman (Tautou again) suffering from a strange illness: she has a water

lily growing in her lungs.

Chinese Puzzle is third chapter in Cedric Klapisch's *Auberge Espagnole* trilogy. Do you enjoy going back each time? Yes, and after Spain and Russia, I think it was a great idea of Cedric's to go to New York. There is something about life for people in their 40s: there are couples, there are children, everybody is coming from different places. New York is a good place to express that feeling.

You and Audrey have worked together many times. You must get on well.

It's very easy with Audrey because she's so natural. She's playing with you and not with the camera, so it's easy to do



something different each time we work together. When we were making *Chinese Puzzle*, I could see in her eyes that I wasn't the same guy I was in *Mood Indigo* for her. We have this strange relationship. We do these intense things together on screen but afterwards we're not going to restaurants together.

Mood Indigo is typically mind-boggling. Have you always been a fan of Gondry's surrealist narratives?

I don't love the surrealist thing in general but I always love what Michel does with it because he does surrealism with the imagination of a child. I don't like surrealism when it's taken too seriously. I never liked surrealist paintings and I didn't like the book when I read it as a teenager, although I discovered another level when I read it again recently.

Even though you shot Chinese Puzzle in New York, unlike many French actors, you almost never go off to do English-language films. Is that deliberate?

Actually, I did one but with a French director [laughs]. After that, I have been sent scripts but I've never found a character to create. I don't want to go to America just because I'm a little bit famous here; I don't care.

Are there American or British directors you would leap at the chance to work with?

I love James Gray [*We Own The Night*, *The Immigrant*]. There are a lot of directors who are very interesting. But I don't like to knock on a director's door and say, "Come on, we have to do something together". I'm a little

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bit shy that way. I have to trust directors and I like it when they want me.

Is there snobbishness in the French film industry about actors who do work outside of France?

Maybe in some people. When they see someone like Jean Reno going off to do action movies, maybe they think it's boring or don't understand why. But for me, it's great. When I see Marion Cotillard or Jean Dujardin in big American films, I say, Bravo, come on!

Do you have any issues with typecasting in France?

In France, it's typical to put people in boxes and I'm aware of it but I don't pay attention to it. I'm doing theatre and comedy and drama so I'm never getting bored. I think the more you work, the more doors open. When it comes to acting, I have many more weapons at my disposal than before. I'm not getting tired of acting at all; in fact it's the opposite.

Outside France, you're often viewed as the archetype of the French lover. Are you comfortable with that image?

I don't feel comfortable with any image! I'm just Romain, that's it. I like simple pleasures, I like a simple life. I love the same things now I liked when I was young: nature, the sea, travelling.

At one point, you were studying to be an artist. Is that still part of your simple life?

Of course, I love it. I paint but I don't do exhibitions. Actors have to show a lot so I try to keep this just for me.

What do you paint?

At the moment, I'm painting couples making love, in different landscapes, in different situations. It's not pornographic, it's funny. It's about life. [Smiles] It's the international language.

Chinese Puzzle is released in UK cinemas on 20 June; Mood Indigo will be released later in the summer.