



PRODUCTION NOTES

HeartBreaker

A film by
Pascal Chaumeil

Starring
Romain Duris and Vanessa Paradis

Release date: December 26, 2010

Running time: 104 minutes

Rated: TBC

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Few romantic comedies in the last decade have even come close to the gates of the rom-com hall of fame, let alone entered them.

HEARTBREAKER has all the elements and more to become an all-time classic in its genre: originality, wit and above all, breath-taking romance.

Taking a staggering 1.7 million admissions in its French opening weekend, the film marks director Pascal Chaumeil's feature debut and stars the gorgeous paring of Vanessa Paradis and Romain Duris.

Meet Alex (Duris). He's charming, funny, effortlessly cool, and most importantly, irresistible to women.

Alex offers a professional service; to break up relationships. In just a few weeks, for a fee equivalent to his reputation, he promises to transform any husband, fiancé or boyfriend into an ex. Hideouts, phone-tapping, fake identities, a devastating smile, anything goes when it comes to fulfilling his contract.

Meet Juliette (Paradis). She's a young, beautiful, free-spirited and independent heiress, with a passion for shopping, fine wine, and a word-perfect knowledge of Dirty Dancing. In ten days she's due to marry the man of her dreams (Andrew Lincoln), much to her father's disapproval.

When Alex is hired to break up this seemingly perfect couple he is thrown into a action-filled race against time, taking him through the sun-drenched streets of Paris to the fast cars and high fashion of Monaco, in his own hilarious seduction "mission impossible" that risks him being caught by his ruthless personal creditors, angry exes, and Juliette herself.

But worst of all, will he discover to his own cost that when it comes to love, the perfect plan doesn't exist?

ROMAIN DURIS • ALEX

Alex is a charming, attractive, self-proclaimed expert in seduction.

His job: Professional couple-wrecker.

His objective: Make women realise that their love life is not viable.

His methods: Lying, master of disguise, sweet talking, dancing like a God, cooking like a chef, confidence building, seduction.

All the women he attempts to seduce fall under his spell. In his ten-year career he has never failed on a mission. But the 'Couples Break-Up' company he created with his sister and his brother-in-law is on the brink of financial ruin. 'Operation Juliette' comes at the perfect time.

Romain Duris is one of the most successful, prolific French actors of his generation. He has made 33 feature films in 15 years. Part of a family of artists and with no formal drama training, he was spotted on the street by a casting director. Romain Duris's first film role was in *Good Old Daze (Le Péril Jeune)*. He is multiple award winner French director's Cedric Klapisch's favourite actor, and has so far been in six of his films.

He was nominated for three Cesar Awards, for *Gadjo Dilo* (1999), *Maybe* (2000) and *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* (2006), and has worked with a number of prestigious actors including Isabelle Adjani, Juliette Binoche, Jean-Paul Belmondo and Fabrice Luchini. In 2008 he starred in his first English film, *Afterwards*, alongside John Malkovich.

For the first time in his career, he takes to the stage in 2010.

INTERVIEW WITH ROMAIN DURIS

Q: What was your reaction when you first read the script for HEARTBREAKER?

A: I was scared! (laughs) Seriously, I was immediately drawn by the central idea of the film and the character Alex. But I had never done a romantic comedy before this, so didn't have a clear point of reference. It seemed right to me that the vision of the director was going to be essential to the look of the film, so I wanted to meet with Pascal Chaumeil straight away. During our discussions I realised that he was someone who reacts, who is flexible and open to suggestion. The type of person who isn't arrogant and doesn't act all superior but knows full well what he wants.

Q: What did you suggest during your discussion?

A: Initially I wanted to bring the romantic aspect of the film to the fore by really highlighting the emotional encounter between my character and Vanessa's, for example. Similar to the 'love at first sight' type English romantic comedies such as *Notting Hill*, where we want the heroes to kiss and although we see it coming, we are still touched when it happens.

Q: How did you and Pascal work together?

A: We worked really well together. We both agreed straight away that my character had to have a certain freedom about him. If ever there was any doubt, he would notice it and ensure it disappeared immediately. His ability to react is a major asset, which allowed the film to stay on track. With a strong script and concept, Pascal also gave himself a lot of freedom to play the scenes out. He's very present on the set. For each scene he wanted a start and a drop, to maintain the rhythm and efficiency, in a good way. There was never any superfluous element in what we shot. He has a formidable sense of focus.

Q: How would you describe your character, Alex?

A: He's a guy who is struggling in life and has experienced a lot of failed love stories, but who is quite smart and eventually discovers love through his encounter with Vanessa's character.

Q: Was it difficult to get into the skin of the character?

A: For years, I did deep, serious films such as *The Beat That My Heart Skipped*, *Persecution and Paris*, where I tried to give the best of myself while also spending a lot of time reflecting. I found myself doing the same background work on a romantic comedy. I didn't want Alex to be just a flirty, cheeky-smiling, super confident James Bond type who breezily chats women up. He needed to be someone who touched the audience, and show that he was

really struggling in his own personal life. I wanted the audience to understand that he was doing this couple break-up job to earn a living. Anyway, this is the route I took to get into his skin. Had I not done this upstream thinking, I would have never had the freedom and spontaneity I needed on set. I really enjoyed myself in front of Pascal's camera; I just followed my instinct, especially since we shot this very quickly without doing many takes. The only thing I really worked on at that point were the dance scenes with Vanessa, which proved to be the best way to get to know each other.

Q: How was your collaboration with Vanessa?

A: I had never met her before but I always wanted to work with her because I adore her as an actress. On set, I love the way she portrayed her character; at first very cold, and as you go along she starts to ease up a bit. She has a very subtle interpretation, but seeing her way of working, it's not surprising. From the first to the last day, we worked while listening and complementing each other. She is part of that rare breed of actresses.

Q: We were also impressed by the complicity that linked you with your two partners, Julie Ferrier and François Damiens, from the first scene on. How did you build that link?

A: It's very simple! You just have to go to Morocco for 5 days with these two, and spend 8 hours a day travelling in a car through the Moroccan desert – and you start bonding! Nonetheless, this only happens if the casting is well done to start with. This is where intelligence and the force of the director really becomes obvious, in his capacity as director to bring different personalities together under the same roof. Our meeting was a big moment, but it wasn't all fun and games. We all were very concentrated on set because it was the start of the shoot. We listened closely to Pascal, to his way of working, with the aim of getting it right straight away, as we knew we were not getting many takes. But this crazy vibe between us saved a lot of time. The complicity in laughter arrived with it all.

Q: It's this very complicity that makes the Dirty Dancing scene where you train on François Damiens's choreography so funny. How did the shooting roll out?

A: We improvised a little. When you push Francois too much he forgets his text and mixes up words, it's genius! But it was a very difficult scene to shoot, because I couldn't stop laughing. I couldn't look at him any more. Pascal did a great job in taking the humour of the moment to the screen. This is what he did all along the film, prioritised the mood over the words.

VANESSA PARADIS • JULIETTE

Juliette is ravishing, distinguished, and attractive. She is going to marry Jonathan in 10 days.

Her character traits: Intelligent, financially independent, unperturbed, she loves luxury and hates injustice, however she has a conflictive relationship with her father.

Her job: Wine connoisseur.

Her passions: George Michael, Breakfast At Tiffany's and Dirty Dancing.

Although Juliette appears settled and content with her current situation, she harbours a secret. Years before, after being accepted to a top business school, she disappeared without an explanation or reason. When she returned home a year later, she promptly changed her life around and never provided a reason for her absence.

Model, singer and actress **Vanessa Paradis** became a household name at the tender age of 14, when her song "Joe Le Taxi" spent 11 weeks at the top of the French chart and became a success in 15 countries. Since then she has had an accomplished career in music, film and modelling. At 18 she was awarded a César Award for Most

Promising Actress in her debut film, *Noce Blanche*. She also won the Romy Schneider Award. In 2000 she was nominated for a Best Actress César for her role as Adèle in Best Foreign Film Golden Globe winner, *La Fille Sur Le Pont*. Legendary acting partners include: Jeanne Moreau, Gérard Depardieu, Alain Delon and Jean-Paul Belmondo. **HEARTBREAKER** is her first romantic comedy.

Vanessa is currently the face of Chanel's Rouge Coco lipstick line and Coco Cocoon handbag line. She is soon to start shooting on her latest film, *My American Lover*, about French writer and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, in which she will be united on screen with her partner, Johnny Depp.

INTERVIEW WITH VANESSA PARADIS

Q: What made you want to take part into this film?

A: The script made me laugh - I was charmed! Usually, I'm more drawn to dramatic scenarios but I liked the director's vision, and I liked the idea of Romain Duris playing Alex, which was rather unexpected as he doesn't usually act in this genre. When filming started I was scared I was playing the most discrete character.

Q: Was it a challenge to play in a movie standing at the crossroads of romantic comedy, spy movies and action?

A: I started acting being a bit anxious; while I'm not afraid of playing in a drama or expressing heart-breaking emotions, HEARTBREAKER is action-packed and dialogue needs to be spot on. If you overact, it can look ridiculous; you have to be subtle.

Q: Did you have any apprehension before your dance scene with Romain Duris?

A: I knew I would have to work and rehearse a lot to prepare for this one, but I was looking forward to it, as much as I had anxiety. We worked hard as well as laughed a lot on this one!

Q: What kind of tone did you want to give to your character?

A: The director and I thought about the glamour of Hollywood film stars from the 40s and 50s. He didn't look for a feline-like Juliette, but more a glamorous girl with character; I gave her an authoritarian and energetic twist. My costumes are very glam too, as I wear a lot of high heels, giving me that ultra-feminine look. I had to keep my head up and swing my hips from left to right.

Q: How do you judge your partners' acting?

A: It was impressive to see Romain impersonate the various sides of his character as if he'd done that his whole life. He must have played about a dozen different jobs and identities. He pushes it to the maximum but always remains subtle. It's very pleasant to act with him. I also loved spending a few months with Julie Ferrier and François Damiens who both impressed me a lot.

Q: What do you think about Alex's job as a couple-breaker?

A: Alex breaks couples because his job requires him to. He doesn't target those who are happy and intervenes only when the woman is in distress.

ANDREW LINCOLN • JONATHAN

Jonathan is Juliette's English fiancé. Part of a family of rich Londoners, he is charming and sophisticated and showers her with gifts. He is also the founder of a children's charity, which feeds more than 10 million children around the world. No wonder Alex has nicknamed him "Mr. Perfect".

Andrew Lincoln trained at RADA. He rose to fame playing a trainee lawyer with his head in the clouds in the hit BBC drama *This Life*. Success followed with a string of film and TV roles including *Gangster No.1* alongside Malcolm McDowell. In 2001, Lincoln began a three-year stint in the comedy-drama *Teachers* which he went on to direct, receiving a BAFTA-nomination for his work.

In 2003, he lined-up amongst an ensemble of stars in Richard Curtis' romantic comedy *Love Actually*. Throughout his varied career, Lincoln has undertaken a number of critically-acclaimed theatre roles, including, most recently, philanderer Dale in Jez Butterworth's *Parlour Song*. He will next star in the US AMC series *The Waking Dead*.

INTERVIEW WITH ANDREW LINCOLN

Q: You've said working on the film was an honour.

A: It was a pleasure and an honour for me to play with Vanessa Paradis and Romain Duris. If they hadn't been in the cast I probably wouldn't have said "yes" to this.

Q: How would you describe your character?

A: Jonathan is very successful English businessman. He seems to have the perfect life and the perfect girlfriend. But suddenly something goes wrong and their union is questioned. This is different from the other parts I've been playing until now, as I usually ended up being a successful lover!

Q: How do you see Alex's job as a couple-breaker?

A: I think there are professional couple-breakers all around the world but as far as I'm concerned, I wouldn't enjoy the job – not really my thing getting paid to break up couples. But I loved the idea for the movie!

Q: How different is the way actors are directed in France and in English speaking countries?

A: The atmosphere and energy are very different. In France, you don't feel the pressure of hierarchy; authority doesn't matter. Everyone can express their views, and make proposals, while on American movies things are more supervised. I like the relaxed attitude in France!

Q: Do you think there's an Anglo-Saxon touch in HEARTBREAKER?

A: I noticed that the camera moves a lot in the film, that's really fluid and sexy. There's an English word that describes it - "swagger". It means well balanced. I'm not so familiar with filming in France, but during the HEARTBREAKER shoot I noticed a very different style from the one I saw in other French movies a while ago. HEARTBREAKER has a stylish look, and a very fast pace.

JACQUES FRANTZ • VAN DER BECQ

Juliette's father, Van De Becq is always smartly dressed and a man of strong convictions. He is a businessman and flower wholesaler; however his 'extracurricular' activities have led to involvement with the Mafia. His relationship with his daughter is troubled and thorny. He strongly disapproves of Juliet's marriage to Englishman Jonathan and therefore employs Alex to break up their union.

Jaques Frantz is known in France as the dubbed voice of Robert De Niro, Mel Gibson, John Goodman and Nick Nolte, and has had numerous film, TV and radio roles. Feature films include *Don Juan*, *Gi Joe: The Rise Of The Cobra*, *La Première Étoile* and *Le Joli Coeur*.

JULIE FERRIER • MÉLANIE

Melanie is Alex's sister and has been married to Marc for 10 years. Working with her brother, she is Financial Director of the "Couples Break-up" company. She is the guarantor of the ethical codes of the company: never break up couples for racial or religious reasons, absolute confidentiality and disappear as soon as the mission is accomplished.

Part of the 8 generation of actors from her mother's side, **Julie Ferrier's** first passion was dance. Before turning to acting she had a successful ten-year career as a dancer, and worked with famous choreographers such as Philippe Decouflé, Rheda and Rick Odums. She attended the École du Cirque Fratellini and the Paris Conservatoire of Music and Dramatic Art, and went on to study drama at the Jacques Lecoq International School of Theatre. In 2006, her one-woman show *Aujourd'hui C'est Ferrier* was a public and critical success.

Her first film role was in French comedy *Madame Irma*. Since then she has been in eight feature films, including Cédric Klapisch's award nominated *Paris*, in which she acted with Juliette Binoche and Roman Duris, and Jean-Pierre Jeunet's latest film, *Micmacs*.

FRANÇOIS DAMIENS • MARC

Marc is Melanie's husband and therefore Alex's brother-in-law. He aspires to be like him: an expert female seducer. But it just doesn't work for him!

He is the IT expert at the "Couples Break-up" company responsible for the technical side of the missions.

Belgian actor **François Damiens** made his name on Belgian TV as François The Confused, the host of a hidden camera prank show. François made his film debut in 2005 with *Les Hauts Murs*, and has been in fifteen films since, including *15 Ans Et Demis*, *Le Petit Nicolas* and *Torpedo*.

HELENA NOGUERRA • SOPHIE

Sophie is Juliette's childhood friend. She's a beautiful, uninhibited nymphomaniac. She has a questionable fashion sense, always wears cowboy boots and has a strong addiction to alcohol. She is also very blunt. Her colourful language makes up a woman that's worth a detour!

Helena Noguerra is a Belgian actress, singer and television presenter of Portuguese descent. She is the author of two novels, written in 2002 and 2004, and a theatre play, *Et Après...*, in which she also starred. Other theatre work includes *Le Roman D'un Trader* by Jean-Louis Bauer at the Nice National Theatre and *Faces* by John Cassavetes.

Her Top 3 films at the Box Office are French comedy *Ah ! Si J'étais Riche*, directed by Gérard Bitton and Michel Munz, Christophe Honoré's *Dans Paris* and *La Boîte Noire* by Richard Berry.

BEHIND THE CAMERA CREW BIOGRAPHY

PASCAL CHAUMEIL • DIRECTOR

Pascal Chaumeil's credits as assistant director include the French films *Je Suis Le Seigneur Du Château*, *Un Été D'orages*, *Une Nouvelle Vie* and *Léon*. He also worked as Second Unit Director to Luc Besson's *The Fifth Element*. Consequently, Besson produced his two short films. Although *HEARTBREAKER* is Chaumeil's debut in feature films, he has directed over a hundred advertisements and sitcoms and films made for TV.

INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR PASCAL CHAUMEIL

Q: How did you become involved in HEARTBREAKER?

A: I've worked with the producer Nicolas Duval Adassovsky before, and he gave me the script to read. I was enthusiastic about the idea of a couple-breaker, but I had some questions about some elements in the script. I met the scriptwriter Laurent Zeitoun and we re-drafted it, delivering a new version one month later. And then the casting began!

Q: Do you think the idea of breaking couples is immoral or not politically correct?

A: The film isn't entirely politically correct; there's almost an underlying social commentary. Alex comes from a less privileged background than Juliette, the young woman he's supposed to seduce, so it touches on social classes. The film shows you must follow your instinct, despite such social conventions. Even if Alex's methods are slightly suspect at times, his job consists of helping women make essential choices in their life, so in the end it is quite a principled idea.

Q: How did you choose the actors?

A: The film is a love story in the making. I wanted to offer the public something different, but something still sexy. Vanessa Paradis and Romain Duris were selected pretty quickly, as well as Julie Ferrier. It's not so much her aptitude to impersonate so many characters that attracted us, but her charisma. She's full of energy, and very physical, full of surprises. Julie made some scenes comical, when they weren't designed to be so, initially.

Q: Why did you choose Romain Duris?

A: I wanted an actor with a natural charm, I didn't want to have to create the seduction aura through the scenario. Very few actors of his generation have his charisma and his roles in the Klapisch movies prove he's also talented for comedy.

Q: Was Vanessa Paradis' part tailor-made for her?

A: There were very few actresses able to play Juliette. Vanessa was the first to read the script, and she immediately loved it. Further to her talent as an actress, her beauty and her photogenic qualities, she's also an icon. Her status further enforced the story. Juliette is rather difficult to access, Vanessa has given the character her mystery, her strength and her fragility. It was so pleasant to see her in a more glamorous role than the ones she had until now!

Q: What were your intentions in terms of rhythm, directing and cutting?

A: My only principle is not to have any principles. I hate pre-conceived ideas. This has been my method on all the films I directed previously, as well as on *HEARTBREAKER*. I like to find the ideas together with the actors and give them space. Their creativity is important to me.

LAURENT ZEITOUN • SCRIPT WRITER AND PRODUCER

Laurent Zeitoun began his working life as a trader in New-York. During a visit to the Paramount studios in Los Angeles, he discovered script writing. He attended writing workshops in Los Angeles for a year and a half. Back in Paris, he joined Dominique Farrugia's production company. In 2001 he founded the "Script Associés (Script Associates)" writing company. He was a consultant on several feature films and was co-script writer on Prête-Moi Ta Main (Give Me Your Hand) which took more than 3.7million Euros at the Box office, and Les 11 Commandements (The 11th Commandment). HEARTBREAKER is his first feature film as co-producer.

CREDITS

Cast

Alex	Romain DURIS
Juliette	Vanessa PARADIS
Mélanie	Julie FERRIER
Marc	François DAMIENS
Sophie	Helena NOGUERRA
Jonathan	Andrew LINCOLN
Van Der Becq	Jacques FRANTZ
Florence	Amandine DEWASMES
Dutour	Jean-Yves LAFESSE
Goran	Jean-Marie PARIS
Hotel Manager (Montecarlo Bay)	Tarek BOUDALI
Companion	Philippe LACHEAU
Step Father of Juliette	Geoffrey BATEMAN
Step Mother of Juliette	Natasha CASHEMAN
Franck	Franck MASSIAH
Japanese Businesswoman	Hironi ASAI
Clerk	Sophie JEZEQUEL
Policewoman	Audrey LAMY
Auctioneer	Dominique GAFFIERI
Friend of Alex	Elodie FRENCK
Brother of Florence	Julien ARRUTI
Curler	Camille FIGUEREOS
Gospel Singer	Nina MELO
Librarian	Adina CARTIANU

Crew

Director	Pascal CHAUMEIL
Scriptwriters	Laurent ZEITOUN, Jeremy DONER, Yoann GROMB
Producers	Nicolas DUVAL ADASSOVSKY, Yann ZENOU, Laurent ZEITOUN
Production Director	Camille LIPMANN
Photography Director	Thierry ARBOGAST
Camera	Jean-Paul AGOSTINI
Steadycam	Nicolas DOLLANDER
Script	Sophie LEBRETON
Casting Director	Tatiana VIALLE
Scenography	Hervé GALLET
Costume Designer	Charlotte BETAÏLLOLE
Costume	Laetitia BOUIX, Sophie BAY-BAUDENS
Make Up	Christophe DANCHAUD
Chief Make Up	Frédéric MARIN, Suzel BERTRAND
Hair	John NOLLET
Chief Hair	Véronique BOITOUT
Sound	Pascal ARMANT
Stunts	Philippe GUEGAN
Choreography	Christophe DANCHAUD
Special Effects Supervisor	Julien PONCET de LA GRAVE
Chief Editor	Dorian RIGAL-ANSOUS
Composer	Klaus BADEL

Film Review
LOS ANGELES TIMES
By Kenneth Turan

Slick entertainment is rarely as, yes, slickly entertaining as it is in "Heartbreaker," a French romantic farce that is commercial cinema at its most successful. Given that Hollywood has all but forgotten how to turn out adult amusements of this type, it's especially welcome.

A major box office hit in France, "Heartbreaker" took a certain risk in featuring two major dramatic stars, Romain Duris and Vanessa Paradis, who'd never done romantic comedy before. You'd never know that from what's on screen, however, as both performers throw themselves into the parts with enthusiasm and panache.

They're helped by efficient direction by Pascal Chaumeil, a television and commercial veteran making his feature debut, and a clever, efficient script (Laurent Zeitoun, Jeremy Doner and Yoann Gromb) inspired by a situation in Zeitoun's family.

That premise, like many strong commercial ideas, is both familiar and a bit surprising. Duris plays Alex, a handsome devil who breaks up couples for a living. Working with his sister Melanie (Julie Ferrier) and her husband, Marc (Francois Damiens), he is hired by disgruntled relatives to talk women out of relationships without anyone being the wiser.

Alex, it should be emphasized, is hardly without scruples. Not only won't he destroy couples for religious or racial reasons, he also believes in true love. "We only break up couples," is his motto, "we never break hearts." There also is absolutely no sex involved. Ever.

"Heartbreaker" starts with what is in effect an infomercial for Alex and his system, as we see him work his magic in all kinds of situations. Duris, best known to American audiences for starring in Jacques Audiard's "The Beat That My Heart Skipped" and the films of Cedric Klapisch, adds his own particular intensity to this light comic role to excellent effect.

Ordinarily Alex would never attempt to break up Juliette (Paradis) and her fiancé Jonathan (Andrew Lincoln). She is a wine expert, he a philanthropist, and they are so in love that the word on the street is "god couldn't have created a more perfect couple." But Alex is also in desperate need of funds, so he takes the assignment from Juliette's wealthy and controlling father.

With only 10 days to go before the big event, Alex follows Juliette to the wedding site in Monaco, posing as a security expert hired by her father. The beautiful Juliette, however, proves to be more than his match, resisting his wiles so successfully Alex starts to doubt himself.

Paradis, no surprise here, looks terrific in a series of glamorous outfits, but more to the point she infuses a critical strength of character into Juliette. The manipulations Alex and his team perpetrate could potentially be viewed as sour, but because Juliette can so manifestly take care of herself, they come off as comedically as they're intended.

It also helps that Duris and Paradis have excellent on-screen romantic chemistry. It's fun to watch them play off each other, especially in set pieces like their duet duplicating the moves from "Dirty Dancing," a particular favorite of Juliette's that Alex has learned in an attempt to get on her good side.

"Heartbreaker's" plot is as carefully worked out as a clock mechanism, and one of the pleasures of watching it is appreciating the artful and confident professionalism with which it unfolds. The scenario may feel a trifle long at times, but with stars this attractive, it would be bad manners to complain.

FILM REVIEW
Telegraph (UK)
By David Gritten

Heartbreaker recalls a time in film history when rom-coms were amusing and glamorous as well as romantic.

Given that Hollywood now sets the bar for romantic comedy so dismally low, it seems like damning with faint praise to proclaim the French film *Heartbreaker* the year's best.

Yet it assuredly is: it recalls a time in film history when rom-coms were amusing and glamorous as well as romantic. There's an agreeably spiky chemistry between its two protagonists, some acid wit, and surprisingly an element of madcap physical comedy. Being set in sun-drenched Monte Carlo, it even echoes mid-20th century films that used the stunning Riviera coastline as a backdrop for courtship.

Dishevelled dreamboat Romain Duris (*The Beat That My Heart Skipped*), whose USP until now has been brooding intensity, radically extends his brief here.

He is Alex, the lynchpin of a business hired to drive a wedge between unsuitable couples; with his smart, versatile sister (an excellent Julie Ferrier) and hapless brother-in-law (François Damiens) in support, he deploys his seductive charm to help women see the flaws in their romantic lives.

His toughest assignment is being engaged by the suspicious father of Juliette (Vanessa Paradis, sleek and sharp-witted), a strong-minded businesswoman about to marry a charming, wealthy English philanthropist (Andrew Lincoln).

Heartbreaker starts strongly, with a brilliant prologue showing Alex in action; posing as a dashing humanitarian doctor, he hurtles around north African villages in his jeep, administering vaccines to doe-eyed children, while the woman he has been hired to target goes visibly weak-kneed. It's a darkly funny sequence that does not flinch from the cynicism of Alex's trade.

Like most romantic comedies, *Heartbreaker's* ending is hardly unpredictable.

But it's so smart, well-acted and fast on its feet that the journey trumps the final destination.

FILM REVIEW

Shadows On The Wall

By Rich Cline

This delightful romantic comedy refuses to play by Hollywood rules. So even though it's as predictable as you'd expect, it keeps the characters grounded in reality. And their dialog is peppered with truly terrific lines.

Alex (Duris) is a charming rogue makes a living breaking up undesirable relationships. Working with his sister (Ferrier) and her husband (Damiens), he woos women away from unsuitable suitors. His next assignment is in Monaco, where he must pry the wealthy Juliette (Paradis) from her lovely, wealthy British fiance (Lincoln). Posing as her bodyguard, Alex succeeds in catching her eye, but will she fall for him in time to stop the wedding? And what if Alex falls for her?

The first thing you notice about this film is its sharp writing; it feels like it's been decades since we've seen a rom-com this sparkling. Snappy dialog and strong characters like this went missing in American cinema back in the 1960s, so leave it to France to show how it should be done. Sure, there's an unnecessary subplot involving a loan shark and his meathead goon (Paris), but the script cleverly refuses to let it take over the movie.

Like Alex himself, this film charms the socks off us. His choice in music (Wake Me Up Before You Go-go) and movies (Dirty Dancing) is irresistible, and the only question is why Juliette holds out as long as she does. Meanwhile, it's refreshing that Lincoln's character isn't turned into a villain (or even a nice guy with a dark secret). Instead the film lets the romance have its own weight, which is something Hollywood is always afraid to do.

Duris is simply fantastic in the role, which is unlike almost anything he's done before. Gone is his usual brooding, introspective moodiness; Alex is a sexy, funny optimist, and his joie de vivre is infectious. So is his chemistry with Paradis as a strong woman who refuses to fit into any movie stereotype. And fine comic relief is on hand from Ferrier and Damiens as well as Noguerra as Juliette's nymphomaniac pal. This is a lively, funny, sharply well-made rom-com that actually gets better as it goes along.