

Cannes Film Festival opener 'Annette' trifle frustrating



CHENNAI: French director Leos Carax, who created a huge buzz with “Holy Motors” at Cannes a decade ago, returned to the film festival on the picturesque riviera this year with “Annette,” which opened the 12-day event.



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It was the first ever English-language movie from a man who began with “Boy Meets Girl” in 1984, when he was just 24 years old. The first of a trilogy on Paris, it was an ode to silent cinema and even French-Swiss film director Jean-Luc Godard. Often called a poetic genius and enfant terrible in the same breath, he has created some beautiful moments with genres that were varied and mystical.



'Annette' (2021). Supplied

“Annette” is almost magical realism and takes viewers beyond the realm of what is plausible. It is a heady study of how the human mind may run away with unbelievable imagination.

The flick confirms that after all these years, Carax is very much in command of the medium with a style that is lucid and almost freewheeling. A gifted helmer whose romances serve up both ecstasy and agony, his latest work, out in theaters soon, zooms in on a man whose love is so passionate, so complete, that he ends up destroying it. Watching “Annette,” I felt that it was vaguely similar to the films of the 1980s and 1990s.



The film stars Marion Cotillard and Adam Driver. Supplied

Adam Driver plays a powerful stand-up comedian, Henry, whose reputation has dark lines and career seems to be setting. He looks like a boxer in the way he warms up before every show, and on stage he is shocking, often resorting to fake gun attacks and indecent gestures. Is he funny? Hardly, one would think.

His girlfriend, Ann, played by Marion Cotillard (“Rust and Bone,” where she portrays a woman who loses her legs after a shark attack, was just fantastic), is the very opposite of him, and has established herself as a renowned opera singer.



“Annette,” which opened the 12-day Cannes Film Festival. Supplied

Her mad lover would whisk her away to wonderful mountains, and soon she is pregnant. The baby, Annette, has something strange about her. She looks similar to a wooden doll and grows up to sing as melodiously as her mother.

The plot strays into “A Star is Born” territory, with Henry all consumed by guilt and jealousy as he watches Ann grow in professional stature. And when he finds himself in a mess after being accused by several women of violent and abusive behavior, Carax whips up a storm that is frighteningly destructive.

Pop duo Sparks' musical compositions, especially "We Love Each Other So Much," may have worked as an independent album but doubling up as a narrative pusher, they are out of tune. And often Driver appears to be acting not quite in sync with the rest of the cast, and "Annette" turns out to be a little frustrating.

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