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Cannes Film Festival
opens with *The Second Act*

GAUTAMAN BHASKARAN

The 77th edition of the Cannes Film Festival opened with *The Second Act*, helmed by Quentin Dupieux. With 13 features made since 2007—and six in the past four years alone—the French DJ-turned-director Dupieux is more than just prolific, at least when compared to many leading men in his forte. What is more, he has also penned, shot and edited all of them. For many, he has also scored their music.

The plot may not be very novel—a movie within a movie. It begins with a long discussion between two close friends, Willy (Raphael Quenare) and David (Louis Garrel), as they walk along a serene countryside chatting about Florence (Lea Seydoux, another impressive performance here). David wants Willy to meet her and perhaps begin an affair. As the scene unfolds, we realise that the two men are not pals but actors starring in a film. Ditto with Florence and her father, Guillaume (Vincent Lindon). But midway, they are not convinced by what they are essaying and want to throw it away. A call from his agent saying that a leading helmer wants to cast

him in his latest work seems like a godsend for Guillaume.

The Second Act took me back to Francois Truffaut's memorable classic *Day for Night*, which is also a film within a film. In fact, the Cannes opener plays out like an uproarious take on *Day for Night*, and Dupieux, in good humour, lampoons the terrifying bloated egos of a few of the famous French actors. However, he also weaves into his story some other current points, like AI (which is used to cut costs), the cancel culture and the #MeToo movement in the French industry.

The Second Act has many more surprises or shocks in store for us as it saunters in and out of issues like the panic attacks some French stars have and the ego trips they take. Seydoux plays a thoroughly spoilt starlet who lacks confidence in her "talent". Garrel's character hides his arrogance behind his affable manners. Lindon may be an experienced veteran, but he is extremely impatient with newcomers.

The Second Act may be Dupieux's strongest and perhaps most controversial work to date, and is bound to open up Pandora's Box.

The writer is a senior film critic, and has been covering the Cannes Film Festival for over three decades.

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