



## THE UNKNOWN CELEBRITY

BY DAVID LOWE

I don't know whether you've made the connection, but I'm the same David Lowe who presents a TV programme on FR5 every week. I'm also the same David Lowe who did a weekly *chronique* on France Inter (*Le Fou du Roi*). Or maybe *chroniqueur anglais* on *Union Libre* with Christine Bravo rings a bell? For the more enlightened, I was the male lead in Sarah Moon's feature film, *Mississippi One*, and also had parts in *Midnight in Paris*, *The Borgias*, *The Man in the Iron Mask*, etc., etc. It's a bit embarrassing (pathetic even) having to tell people that you're famous, since being famous should be self-evident. It's like explaining to the bank manager that you're rich when you have no money left in your account.

Of course, it's not just me. I once filmed a commercial in New York where I played a rather comical character who wore glasses. One of the extras thought I was Woody Allen, even though Woody Allen is older, shorter, virtually bald, and is New York Jewish compared to my north of England Anglican. I was rather flattered. I suppose Woody Allen would have been a little saddened by the fact that his fame rested on a pair of spectacles. When I worked with him a few years later, he didn't confuse himself with me! The other day during a conversation, I told a work colleague that I was the actor in the VW Passat commercial *La limande* twenty years ago. "C'était toi!" he exclaimed. He hadn't forgotten me; it's just that he hadn't made the connection between me and me, so to speak. This phenomenon of being recognized, but not spontaneously, is like having lots of acquaintances with advanced Alzheimer's.

"On se connaît?" they say with a little smile, as if they've met an old friend. "Yes, I'm Gérard Depardieu," replies the "famous" actor.

Recently I was interviewed on a TV programme by somebody who was a bit of a celebrity, even though I'd never heard of him, who kept on referring to me as a presenter of *On n'est pas que des pigeons*. I actually present *On n'est pas que des cobayes*, which is not the same thing at all. I thought he was gently mocking

me. The number of times I've heard, "Ah yes, you were in *Frou-Frou* with Christine Ockrent!" But no, he insisted that I was a pigeon and not a guinea pig. To avoid embarrassment, I told him that it didn't matter, as most TV programmes have silly titles anyway. On a *tout essuyé* [instead of *On a tout essayé*] I gave as a humorous example.

After the interview I made my way to the Champs Élysées, where I had arranged to meet my wife. While I was waiting, a man in a black overcoat came up to me and asked, "Are you going to sing this afternoon?" "Pardon?" I replied. He realized his mistake. "You're not the singer... what's his name?" He'd mistaken me for a French variety singer whose name he had forgotten. We spent a few minutes trying to remember the name of who I wasn't. Fame amnesia applied to two "well-known" people at the same time – two birds missed with one stone. We didn't find the singer's name, but found several clues. The singer's best friend was *métisse*. He was also a musician and they often sang together, but we couldn't for the life of us remember his name either. This was *Trivial Pursuit* played by two memory-deficient morons. We were interrupted by a child who asked if I was David. The man in the black overcoat mumbled something like, "No, that's not his name..." and walked off. My new young friend couldn't believe that I was me. He brought over his little brother, his big sister, his mother and his father to show me off. They'd seen the Arc de Triomphe, the Eiffel Tower and now a TV personality. I was a tourist attraction! They almost prodded me in disbelief. I think they had assumed that I was a virtual being who ceased to exist when the TV programme ended. Famous but not real.

Discussing all this later with my wife, the name of the friend of the person I was mistaken for, suddenly came to me – Laurent Voulzy! Then my wife remembered the name of the person the man in the black coat thought I was. Alain Souchon! He thought I was Alain Souchon. But I don't look anything like Alain Souchon! In a word, being famous is just giving a lot of people the power to forget who you are.