



The Main Feature

Season 38 - Issue 14

screening 12.4.18



France 1952 96 minutes black and white Certificate PG

Director Jacques Becker Writers Jacques Becker, Jacques Companeez
Cinematography Robert Le Febvre

Cast:

Marie (Casque d'Or)	Simone Signoret	Georges Manda (Joe)	Serge Reggiani
Félix Leca	Claude Dauphin	Roland Dupuis	William Sabatier
Raymond	Raymond Bussi�eres	Danard	Gaston Modot

A couple of years ago, a generous chum of mine – knowing my fondness for cinema and French cinema in particular – gave me a copy of *Le Cin ema Fran ais*. It’s a book I struggle to hold since it covers the period from 1896 to 2013 and consequently weighs in at 2.4 kg. But it is a real mine of information.

Tonight’s film *Casque d’Or*, made in 1952, sits in what the book calls ‘the post-war age of tradition and quality’ (1946 to 1957) alongside Cocteau’s *La Belle et la B ete* (1946) and Tati’s *Jour de F ete* (1949) both of which we have seen at the club recently. In the book’s timeline, the age of tradition and quality slots in between cinema under the occupation (1940 to 1944) and precedes the New Wave which spanned from 1958 to 1968.

The plot of *Casque d’Or* is drawn from a memoir by Am elie H elie (1878-1933) (her picture is given at the end of these notes), a Parisienne prostitute during *La Belle  poque*, as told to a journalist. Born in Orl ans, her family moved to Paris when she was a girl. At the age of 13, she lived for a year with a 15 year-old workman but was later forcibly separated from him. Her mother died when she was 14 after which she took to the streets, getting involved with a criminal gang nicknamed the Apaches by the press because that part of Paris at the time resembled the Wild West. After being beaten up by her pimp, she met Manda, a 22 year-old gang-leader who didn’t treat her properly either so she turned to Fran ois Leca. There followed a

heady mix of jealousy and crime, the two men eventually being deported to Cayenne by the courts and Amélie becoming – briefly at least – notorious.

The director, Jacques Becker himself adapted Amélie Hélie's story for the screen and in doing so he retained the names of the principal characters Manda, Leca and Casque d'Or but changed their relationships. Leca (Claude Dauphin) becomes the sophisticated gang leader who has designs on Casque d'Or whilst Manda (whose real name is Joe, played by Serge Reggiani) is a reformed criminal who is making an honest but modest living as a carpenter and courting the daughter of his boss Danart (Gaston Modet). Becker keeps the background of prostitutes, pimps and crime but removes the more sordid elements and transforms it into a love story.

It opens with Manda helping Danart put up the bandstand in a guinguette, a café with music and dancing in the country near a river, when he meets one of his old criminal acquaintances Raymond (Raymond Bussièrès) who is there with other members of his gang and their girls. One of their party is Casque d'Or and Manda falls for her at first sight even though she is with her current lover Roland (William Sabatier). The story evolves as the rivalries develop, initially between Manda and Roland, and then between Roland and Leca.

Central to the film is Simone Signoret's portrayal of Marie (Casque d'Or) which shows her strength as a woman – a pre-feminist icon of the 1950s as one critic put it. In the opening scene on the river she is the only woman rowing a boat. Later she fights against the tyranny of men, telling her pimp to get lost, defying the macho gang and not being afraid to take the initiative. She shows a directness in seducing Manda away from his rather proper (and probably chaste) relationship with Danart's daughter. The character is much more than a tart with a heart of gold. And even though this is a period drama, the costumes do not get in the way of an authentic, realistic and tragic love story.

The style of the film probably owes something to the fact that Becker had been mentored early in his career by Jean Renoir which comes through in his portrayal of the working class. There are references to Renoir's painter father as well: the early scenes in the guinguette by the river could have been painted by him.

This is not an optimistic film, especially in the final scenes which the censor at the time had concerns about, but Becker insisted be left in. And the pessimism is emphasized by use of the song *Le Temps de Cerises*



on the soundtrack. Initially written just before the short-lived 1871 popular uprising in Paris which was brutally put down, it is redolent of the brevity of happiness. Nor was the film particularly successful at the box office in France, though it was admired by the New Wave directors because of its naturalistic approach rather than emphasizing Death, Love, Departure and Destiny. As one critic put it 'Each episode is explicable. Manda is not overwhelmed by the fate found in older German films and Greek tragedy. He is a victim of society'.

What happened to Amélie Hélie in real life? After a period in which she posed for photographers and painters and even worked as a lion tamer in a circus, she got married in 1917 and became a milliner and ran a market stall in Paris. Her husband was a cobbler, and together they brought up their four nephews. In 1933, aged 55, she died of tuberculosis. In the 20th arrondissement of Paris a garden has been named Casque d'Or. The plaque there reads 'Casque d'Or garden. Amélie Hélie, known as Casque d'Or, a romantic young woman, heroine of the film by Jacques Becker as portrayed by Simone Signoret'.

Michael Hipkins

Olivia de Havilland: Acting legend loses court battle

The Oscar-winning actress has lost a legal battle with the makers of US TV drama Feud.

Dame Olivia, 101, had objected to how she was depicted in the series, which explored the bad blood between screen legends Joan Crawford and Bette Davis.

But a state appeals court in California said allowing the case to proceed would interfere with authors' rights to dramatise historical events.

Creator Ryan Murphy called the ruling a "victory for the creative community". Murphy said the decision "gives all creators the breathing room necessary to continue to tell important historical stories inspired by true events".



▲ Olivia de Havilland (left) is portrayed by Catherine Zeta-Jones in Feud: Betty and Joan.
Photograph: AP



De Havilland, who starred in *Gone with the Wind*, among other classic films, filed a lawsuit against Murphy and FX Networks last year, claiming *Feud* portrayed her as a "petty gossip".

Fellow Oscar winner Catherine Zeta Jones played de Havilland in the show, which was broadcast on BBC Two in the UK last year and won two Emmy Awards.

Dame Olivia claimed her portrayal was inaccurate because it showed her calling her sister, Joan Fontaine, a "bitch", and commenting on Frank Sinatra's drinking habits.

But three judges unanimously ordered the dismissal of the case on Monday and ruled that the retired actress must pay FX's legal fees and costs.

"Whether a person portrayed in one of these expressive works is a world-renowned film star - 'a living legend' - or a person no one knows, she or he does not own history," wrote judge Anne Egerton. "Nor does she or he have the legal right to control, dictate, approve, disapprove or veto the creator's portrayal of actual people."

Suzelle Smith, a lawyer for de Havilland, said the California appeal court's decision had denied the actress her constitutional rights and that she would appeal.

Comments and reactions to: **Moonlight**

The chairs were a great improvement. Pity about the film!

Never really got started – didn't work for me New chairs are great though!

Hopeless dialogue – needed superscript. What an unhappy life. The lovely seats were the main attraction and best part of the evening!

An absorbing glimpse into another world

Very good

Very slow – difficult to follow, but what a hard life

Enthralling

Really pleased to have seen the film. Thought provoking.

Acting was superb

Acting fine, lack of any talking interest was boring

Did not enjoy at all

A foreign land, far away and too personal

A provocative and sensitive movie

Bullying, brotherly love – a bit heavy! Good acting.

Enjoyed the film – felt realistic

Disjointed, good acting, but did not enjoy film

Difficult subject matter – well acted

Very well made – excellent cinematography

Rather hard to watch but very well done

It seems wrong to say I “enjoyed” this grim view of real life, but I did!

Wondered why this film won the Oscar – politically correct in many ways?!

Difficult to watch, but evidently very accurate depiction of the time, area etc

Thought provoking depiction of drug domination and vulnerability of young – well made film

Powerful, dramatic, subtle – a lot of the drama played out in the facial expressions and body language of the actors. It worked! Good to have the subtitles.

Trying to be an art-house film? Failed. Telling us something new? Redeemed in the final five minutes.

I really wanted to see this film as I missed it previously. So gloomy – I can't believe it won the Oscar. Thank you for the subtitles.

For me “La La Land” should have been the winner of the Best Picture – look forward to seeing a picture that makes me smile

First time tonight – lovely atmosphere – tea and cakes great idea – will come again!

Thank you!!

Score	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
	~	1	~	2	4	7	8	11	4	2	~

Number of reaction slips received = 39

Average Score = 5.97

Position	Film	Average Score
1 st	Lion	8.46
2 nd	Hidden Figures	8.4
3 rd	A United Kingdom	8.28
4 th	I, Daniel Blake	7.78
5 th	La Famille Belier	7.7
6 th	Coming Home	7.31
7 th	Romeo and Juliet	7.24
8 th	Fuglene Over Sundet (<i>Across the Waters</i>)	7.19
9 th	Hell's Angels	6.03
10 th	Moonlight	5.97
11 th	Nora Inu (<i>Stray Dog</i>)	5.74
12 th	La La Land	5.61
13 th	Mediterraneo	5.47



Our next film on 26 April 2018:

By turns raucously funny, tender, defiant, sad and hopeful. It is a movie that rises to something like greatness on the writing and acting -- and the charisma of its star.