



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Casque d'or

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Unsurprisingly, Truffaut revered Jacques Becker, a former assistant to Renoir who made films of a similarly fluent lyricism and emotional complexity. This elegant blend of crime movie and love story, set in the Paris of the Impressionists, sees a carpenter (Reggiani) incur the wrath of gangleader Félix (Dauphin) when he courts Marie (Signoret). Truffaut especially adored its casting, its narrative sophistication and its visual beauty.

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A contemporary review

Casque d'or is more than ever a proof of Becker's strictness of control; for this is his first 'period' film, and in certain respects an avowed venture into the picturesque. The world that has excited his imagination is that of Paris of *la belle époque*, with all its attendant decorative charm. The social level of the story is low, its tone violent. Marie, its heroine, is a beautiful *gigolette*, nicknamed 'Casque d'or' from her glorious crown of golden hair which she wears dressed 'en casque'; she is the mistress of Roland, one of a gang of cut-throats who operate under the orders of Léca – who himself desires Marie.

Becker is reported to have described the effect he has striven for as 'something between the painter Renoir and Eugène Sue.' The spirit of Renoir is present chiefly in the portrait of Casque d'or herself, most obviously in her coiffure and dress, but also in her generous and challenging sensuality, her delighted response to the physical joy of love; and it is there as well in the presentation of the happier phases of the story – the slow procession of boats, oars dipping and voices singing, laden with apaches and their 'filles', down the river at Joinville; and the pastoral idyll, with its blowing grass and trees, which is Marie's and Manda's short experience of life together. It is the other side of the drama, presumably, that Becker wishes to evoke by his mention of Sue: the narrative of plotting and intrigue; Léca's gang with its code of 'honour' and violence; the ruthless fights-to-the-death. But although there are conventional thriller elements here, all this is a far cry from Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris*. D'Eaubonne's sets and Robert Le Fèbvre's straightforward photography eschew the Gothic for a natural, though continuously atmospheric visual style; and this is matched by a découpage of corresponding sobriety. The story unfolds evenly, in a steady march, of gradual, overpowering effectiveness.

Firstly, it is a love story. Becker's acute sensibility to what one may call the emotional geography, the varying currents and strange depths which characterise the most intimate human relations, has always been one of his strengths and it lifts *Casque d'or* from the category of melodrama, or merely another essay in the romantic-pathetic, to tragedy. Marie and Manda are characters vividly and roundly presented; their relationship changes and progresses, and as it progresses our insight into their situation deepens. This is not the director's achievement alone; he owes a great deal to his actors. The performances of Simone Signoret as Marie and Serge Reggiani as Manda are remarkable above all for their complete fusion, at a level of great intensity,

of their own personalities and acting styles into a shared conception. The effect of unity makes it as impossible to imagine the film without these players, as to imagine it directed by anyone but Becker. Signoret's Marie, in particular, shows a radiant blossoming of talent: a creation entrancingly feminine, with a range of intuition that compasses the arrogant (and irresistible) wilfulness of the earlier sequences as persuasively as the later warmth of a woman passionately and constantly in love. Superbly confident in her power of attraction, it is she who dominates the first half of the film: her reckless provocation of Roland, her summons of Manda, her impertinent encouragement of Léca's advances. Manda, seduced by a glance, fatally allows himself to be led back to the world of crime which he had resolved to put behind him. Once the two have become lovers, however, the balance shifts, to reveal the basis of truth in a relationship so doubtfully entered into.

Manda has been shown from the first as a secret man, driven in upon himself by harsh experience, inflexibly self-reliant. (Reggiani's performance, with its banked interior fire and its almost heroic renunciation of display, communicates exactly the strength and the weakness of this fine-tempered pride. This is resolutely interior acting, with the strength in it to afford the sacrifice of certain immediate effects, to achieve moments of subtle and startling revelation). With intimacy, it is Manda's influence that becomes dominant, his love for Marie still combined with an unswerving pursuit of his self-chosen course of action. Marie loses her stridency (with her *casque*); devotion replaces appetite and the cocotte becomes a wife. When the couple eavesdrop on a bourgeois marriage in the village church, it is she who finds herself affected by the solemn symbolism of the ceremony; Manda, a tender but unsentimental lover, is impatiently indulgent. And when Léca has his friend Raymond arrested for the murder of Roland, the same pride that won Manda his happiness with Marie forces him to sacrifice it. 'N'y pense plus', says Marie as she lies beside him in bed, knowing that he is thinking of his friend, 'Penses à moi.' 'Je pense toujours à toi, Marie,' he replies; but in the morning he has gone. It is the perfect harmony of these scenes between Marie and Manda, very soft and quiet (there are no dwelt-on passages of love-making), and above all their sense of promise as well as fulfilment, that give the end of the film, and their long tearing-apart, its peculiar quality of pain.

Equally, Becker has been able to present the scenes between Marie and Manda with absolute directness and simplicity. Dialogue between them is pared to a minimum; all but the barely essential has been excluded. Marie's seduction of Manda is told in three long panning shots as she waltzes across the room in front of him, cutting from her glowing self-display to his guarded eyes as they follow her past. When she has pursued him to his lodgings, his acceptance and their mutual desire is established without a word: one charged close-up on each, and an embrace.

Writing of Becker in 1947, on the strength of his first three films alone, the French critic Roger Régent remarked on the singular purity of his style, and on its power to build sequences to an extreme degree of tension. In *Casque d'or* this style is more strikingly than ever in evidence. The movement of the whole picture shows a highly developed command of tempo, a rhythm which can accommodate the long, sustained look at a scene (the first set-up of all, for instance), as well as the series of swift, detailed glances. The images are of continuous but simple richness – in particular a poetic use of close-up such as is possible only to an artist who has achieved great sureness of his attitude, as of his *metier*.

Lindsay Anderson, *Sight and Sound*, October-December 1952

CASQUE D'OR

Director: Jacques Becker
Production Companies: Spéva Films, Paris Film Production
Distributed by: Discina
Distributed with the collaboration of: Eclair Journal
Producer: Michel Safra
Production Manager: Henri Baum
Unit Manager: Louis Theron
Assistant to Production Manager: U. Picard
1st Assistant Director: Marcel Camus
2nd Assistant Director: Michel Clément
Script Supervisor: Colette Crochot
Scenario by: Jacques Becker, Jacques Companeez
Adaptation, Dialogue and Découpage: Jacques Becker
Director of Photography: Robert Le Fèbvre
Camera Operator: Jean-Marie Maillols
Camera Assistants: Gilbert Sarthre, Gaston Muller
Gaffer: André Tixier
Travelling Matte Operator: Francis Rivolan
Editor: Marguerite Renoir
Assistant Editor: Geneviève Vaury
Art Director: J.A. d'Eaubonne
Assistant Art Director: Marc Frédéric
Set Designer: F. Marpaux
Set Decorator: Maurice Barnathan
Set Dresser: Dechelle
Props: Terrasse
Costumes Designed by: Mayo
Costumes Made by: Marcelle Desvignes
Corsets by: Marie Rose Le Bigot
Key Costumer: Georgette Fillon
Make-up: B. Karabanoff, M. Vernadet
Hairstyles: Alex Archambault
Laboratory: LTC St. Cloud
Music by: Georges Van Parys
Sound Recording: Antoine Petitjean
Sound Assistants: Auboiron, Ancessi
Sound Recording: Optiphone
Sound System: Western Electric
Music Publisher: Editions Maurice Vandair
Filmed at: Paris Studios Billancourt

Cast

Simone Signoret (*Marie*)
Serge Reggiani (*Georges 'Jo' Manda*)
Claude Dauphin (*Felix Leca*)
Raymond Bussières (*Raymond*)
Odette Barancey (*Mère Eugénie*)
Loleh Bellon (*Leonie Danard, the carpenter's daughter*)
Solange Certin

Jacqueline Dane
Dominique Davray (*Julie*)
Paul Azaïs (*Ponsard*)
Paul Barge (*Inspector Juliani*)
Claude Castaing (*Fredo*)
Jean Clarieux (*Paul*)
Tony Corteggiani (*commissioner*)
Emile Genevois (*Billy*)
Marc Goutas (*Guillaume*)
Gaston Modot (*Danard, the old carpenter*)
William Sabatier (*Roland Dupuis*)
Fernand Trignol (*proprietor of 'Ange Gabriel'*)
Anne Beressy
Marianne Bergue
Jacqueline Canterelle
Gisèle Delzen
Suzanne Grey (*girl*)
Simone Jarnac
Yvette Lucas (*Adele*)
Jacqueline Marbaut
Pâquerette (*grandmother*)
Pomme (*concierge*)
Georgette Talazac (*middle class woman at restaurant*)
Yvonne Yma (*proprietress of 'L'Ange Gabriel'*)
Léon Bary (*diner at 'L'Ange Gabriel'*)
Dalphin
Abel Coulon
Jean Degrave (*diner at 'L'Ange Gabriel'*)
Max Lancourt
Pierre Le Proux
Roland Lesaffre (*Anatole, waiter at 'L'Ange Gabriel'*)
Julien Maffre
Marcel Melrac (*customer at 'guinguette'*)
André Méliès
Bobby Mercier
Louis Moret
René Pascal
Raphaël Patorni (*diner at 'L'Ange Gabriel'*)
Léon Pauléon (*driver*)
Raymond Raynal
Marcel Rouzé (*policeman at police station*)
Roger Vincent (*doctor*)
Daniel Mendaille (*proprietor of riverside 'guinguette'*)*
Jacques Becker (*blind tramp*)*
Henri Coutet, Jean Berton, Joëlle Bernard, Martine Arden,
Christiane Minazzoli *

France 1952
96 mins

* Uncredited

BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Casque d'or

Fri 7 Jan 20:45, Wed 12 Jan 17:50 (+ pre-recorded intro by film critic and historian Pamela Hutchinson), Sun 23 Jan 13:10

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes

Sat 8 Jan 16:00, Thu 13 Jan 18:10, Mon 17 Jan 18:20

Ordet (The Word)

Sun 9 Jan 13:20, Tue 18 Jan 20:30

Smiles of a Summer Night

Sun 9 Jan 16:00, Thu 20 Jan 20:50, Tue 25 Jan 18:10

Bigger Than Life

Mon 10 Jan 14:30, Wed 19 Jan 18:05 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew, Programmer-at-Large), Wed 26 Jan 20:50

La Grande Illusion

Tue 11 Jan 18:15, Sun 16 Jan 12:40

Citizen Kane

Tue 11 Jan 17:50, Thu 27 Jan 18:00

Twelve Angry Men

Fri 14 Jan 14:40, Mon 24 Jan 18:20, Fri 28 Jan 18:20

Letter from an Unknown Woman

Sat 15 Jan 15:40, Mon 31 Jan 20:45

Shadow of a Doubt

Sat 22 Jan 12:10, Tue 25 Jan 14:30

Rome, Open City (Roma, città aperta)

Wed 26 Jan 18:00 (+ intro by lecturer and writer Dr Julia Wagner), Sat 29 Jan 13:00

Les Enfants terribles

Sun 30 Jan 15:15

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