



BIG SCREEN CLASSICS

Le Jour se lève (Daybreak)

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Director: Marcel Carné

Production Company: Productions Sigma

Production Manager: Paul Madeux

Assistant Directors: Pierre Blondy, Jean Fazy

Screenplay: Jacques Viot

Adaptation/Dialogue: Jacques Prévert

Directors of Photography: Curt Courant,

Philippe Agostini, André Bac

Editor: René Le Hénaff

Art Director: Alexandre Trauner

Costumes: Boris Bilinsky

Music: Maurice Jaubert

Sound: Armand Petitjean

Cast:

Jean Gabin (*François*)

Jacqueline Laurent (*Françoise*)

Arletty (*Clara*)

Jules Berry (*Monsieur Valentin*)

Arthur Devère (*Gerbois*)

Bernard Blier (*Gaston*)

René Génin (*the concierge*)

Marcel Pérès (*Paulo*)

Jacques Baumer (*superintendent*)

René Bergeron (*the café owner*)

Mady Berry (*the concierge*)

Georges Douking (*the blind man*)

Germaine Lix (*the singer*)

Gabrielle Fontan (*the lady on the stairs*)

André Nicolle

Léonce Corne

Henri Farty

Guy Rapp

Rogérys

Georges Gosset

Albert Malbert

Robert Leray

Maurice Salabert

Marcel Melrac

Claude Walter

France 1939

93 mins

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away the film's ending.

Released in June 1939, *Le Jour se lève* marks a high point for director Marcel Carné, dialogue writer Jacques Prévert, set designer Alexandre Trauner and star Jean Gabin. With its dark, atmospheric visuals by cinematographer Curt Courant and pervasive sense of fatalism, balanced by the realistic rendering of mundane details, it also represents the culmination of poetic realism, the best-known shade of pre-war French noir.

Through striking use of flashbacks, the film tells the story of François (Gabin), a factory worker romantically involved with young florist Françoise (Jacqueline Laurent) as well as with Clara (Arletty), assistant to louche entertainer and seducer Valentin (Jules Berry). François kills Valentin out of jealousy over Françoise and despite support from those around him, kills himself when the police close in.

Locked in his room for the duration of the film, Gabin brilliantly inhabits his tragic working-class hero, his minimalist acting style chiming perfectly against the superlative Arletty and flamboyant Berry. Despite its ironically hopeful title, *Le Jour se lève* summed up the anxieties of a country on the brink of war. It also seems to us today, as André Bazin put it, to embody 'the ideal qualities of a cinematic paradise lost'.

Ginette Vincendeau, *Sight and Sound*, November 2016

This film probably represents the peak of the achievement of the director Marcel Carné working in association with the poet Jacques Prévert. In *Le Quai des brumes* and *Le Jour se lève* Prévert's feeling for spiritual defeat and Carné's hard sense of locality and character blended perfectly. Touched with a certain popular sentimentality (the orphans in love) and the element of horror (the vaudeville artist and his treatment of his dogs), *Le Jour se lève* is grounded on real human experience of love and beauty and ugliness.

The story of *Le Jour se lève* is simple enough. A chance meeting between an honest workman and a pretty flower-seller leads to a deeply felt love affair. On the man's side this idealistic relationship is supplemented by the earthly attachment he has to a showman's assistant, a good humoured, easy woman capable in her own way of great loyalty and affection; on the girl's side she is fatally fascinated by the showman himself, a half-mad representative of evil whose lust to destroy the happiness of others is so strong that he is prepared to destroy himself in the process. He is a fanatic, believing in his own lies as they pass from one distorted phase to another, fascinating the orphan Françoise with the colour of their mystery and their glimpse of unknown places, revolting the patient honesty of François until he is goaded into destroying the bestial man who seeks to destroy him.

It is easy to see from this bare summary how such people and such a story slip easily into the pigeon holes of symbolism, and once this is done how easy it is to say now that this fatalism of theme belongs spiritually to pre-war France waiting with fascinated inertia for her own destruction by war and invasion. It is a melancholy thought that the post-war malaise of France has allowed the theme to be intensified in *Les Portes de la nuit* instead of transformed by victory into a more vital philosophy.

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L'Argent (Money)

Mon 1 May 13:30; Sat 6 May 15:40;
Sat 27 May 20:40; Tue 30 May 18:10

The Seventh Seal (Det sjunde inseglet)

Tue 2 May 20:40; Sat 6 May 12:30;
Mon 22 May 20:45; Thu 25 May 14:30

The Magnificent Ambersons

Wed 3 May 18:10 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,
Programmer-at-Large); Mon 15 May 20:40

The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie (Le Charme discret de la bourgeoisie)

Thu 4 May 20:55; Tue 16 May 20:40;
Wed 31 May 18:10 (+ intro)

The River

Fri 5 May 20:45; Mon 8 May 13:20;
Sat 13 May 18:10

The Wild Bunch

Sat 6 May 20:10; Sun 14 May 18:00;
Mon 29 May 18:00

Greed

Sun 7 May 12:50; Sun 14 May 15:00

Le Jour se lève (Daybreak)

Tue 9 May 20:50; Thu 11 May 18:30;
Sat 13 May 20:30; Wed 24 May 18:15 (+ intro)

Persepolis

Wed 10 May 18:15 (+ intro); Tue 23 May 18:20;
Sat 27 May 18:10

The Big City (Mahanagar)

Fri 12 May 20:30; Sat 20 May 15:00;
Sun 28 May 12:50

Still Walking (Arutemo Arutemo)

Mon 15 May 14:00 (+ intro); Thu 18 May 18:10;
Sun 21 May 15:40; Fri 26 May 20:30

Dance, Girl, Dance

Tue 16 May 18:20; Sat 27 May 16:00

Scarface

Wed 17 May 18:20 (+ intro by Geoff Andrew,
Programmer-at-Large); Fri 19 May 20:30;
Mon 29 May 13:40

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

Sat 20 May 19:50; Mon 29 May 13:00

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Technically *Le Jour se lève* is a most exciting film. By leading off with the harsh establishment of an act of violence in the middle of a scene of ordinary tenement life, it might be said that Carné played a strong card anyhow, but an examination of the methods by which the tension at the beginning of the film is created in terms of good cinema technique shows that he does not simply depend on the shock of the mortally wounded man reeling out of François's room to establish the effect for him. The tension is established first by Jaubert's sinister music which has something of the same effect as that which accompanies the camera moving up the ironwork gates of Xanadu at the beginning of *Citizen Kane*. The scene is established by the briefest shots seen over the backs of two cart-horses in the foreground, with the tall tenement standing in the background of the grim little industrial place. Then the door at the head of the stairs is seen, shots are heard behind it, the door is wrenched open, a man in a check coat staggers out with his hands pressed to his belly. He tips and falls down the stairs to the landing below up to which a blind man is climbing, tapping with his stick. This last touch reaches its climax with the blind man's terrified cries as he feels the body with the stick. The atmosphere is not one of mere violence; it is one of portentous violence. The difference is created by the selective, rhythmic, suggestive handling of the incident and its locality.

There are many scenes, combining a careful choice of background with an equal, careful choice of character acting, which suggest the significance of the theme to the viewer. This feeling for the medium as well as for the theme is the sign of artistic maturity. There is profound irony in the handling of the deployment of the small arm of police and the watching crowd which is friendly to François but enjoys the spectacle of his trouble; this is in its way as subtle as the contrast of the isolated man in the high attic tower smoking his last cigarettes and putting his memories and emotions into shape to the accompaniment of low pulsations of music like the rhythms of a dying heart.

Never did flashbacks emerge more necessarily from the psychology of a story than do those which François is forced to recall before our eyes: they come as naturally as the imaginary reconstruction created during a sleepless night of emotional anxiety. The music swells up to bursting point as each memory is born. On the other hand there is great tenderness in both kinds of love scene which occur throughout this dark toned film, the sacred love for Françoise epitomised in the simple scene in her bedroom and transfigured in the lovely scene in the greenhouse of flowers (themselves the symbol of her fresh, young beauty), and the profane love for Clara, an honest love of the body based on an easy and friendly acceptance of pleasure.

The two women, united in the last attempt to protect their man at the tragic end of the film, are portrayed in fine contrast by the remote, innocent Jacqueline Laurent and the superbly casual Arletty. Jean Gabin, with his suggestion of the workman poet who does not know his own sensitivity, is equally well cast. But the outstanding performance of the film, because it is the most difficult to make really convincing, is that of Jules Berry as the fanatic masochist, the showman who must give pain for its own sake, even to himself. The terrific characterisation is completely successful: the madness is in his veins and not merely in his contract, as seemed the case with Vincent Price's portrayal of the same man in the American version of the story.

Roger Manvell, National Film Theatre programme notes, 1955