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## CASQUE D'OR (Golden Marie), France, 1952

*Certificate: X. Distributors: Films de France. Production Company: Speva-Films and Paris-Film. Director: Jacques Becker. Script: Jacques Becker and Jacques Companeez. Dialogue: Jacques Becker. Photography: Robert Le Febvre. Editor: Jacques Becker.*

*Art Director: J. A. D'Eaubonne. Music: Georges Van Parys. Leading Players: Simone Signoret (Marie), Serge Reggiani (Manda), Claude Dauphin (Leca), Raymond Bussières (Raymond), Gaston Modot (The Old Carpenter), Paul Barge (Inspector Juliani), Daniel Mendaille (Proprietor of riverside "guinguette"), Trignol (Proprietor of "Ange Gabriel"), Dominique Davray (Julie), Loleh Bellon (The Carpenter's Daughter), Odette Barencey (Mère Eugénie), William Sabatier (Roland), Claude Castaing (Fredo). 8,810 ft. 96 mins.*

On a Sunday afternoon of the summer of 1898, a group of apaches with their gigolettes descend on a small riverside dance-hall. Marie, nick-named "Casque d'Or", is bored with her lover Roland and, seeing Manda, a young carpenter who has forsaken a life of crime to pursue a trade, asks him to dance. They are immediately drawn to each other but when Roland confronts Manda, there is a fight and Manda leaves. When, a few days later, Manda enters the "Ange Gabriel", the gang's meeting place, Leca, the leader, takes his presence to be a challenge and invites him to fight Roland. In the back yard, under Leca's supervision, the duel is fought out with knives. Manda kills his rival.

Though still not suspected by the police, Manda leaves his carpenter's shop and meets Marie in a secluded hut by the river. Their two days' joyful idyll here is interrupted by Leca who, himself wanting Marie, sets a trap for Manda: he tells him that his best friend Raymond has been caught by the police and charged with the murder of Roland. To save his friend, Manda gives himself up. In transit from one prison to another, Marie helps Manda and Raymond to make their escape. Knowing now that it was Leca who gave Raymond away, Manda seeks him out, kills him and again gives himself up. Condemned to death, he is guillotined in a prison courtyard while from a window overlooking the scene Marie looks on. As the knife descends, she relives the first moments of her one great love—in Manda's arms she is dancing away into the distance.

Jacques Becker's acute feeling for location and sense of social *milieux*, demonstrated already in his films with contemporary subjects, is applied in *Casque d'Or* to even more remarkable effect. This is his first period film and he has observed the background of late nineteenth century France minutely yet without self-conscious emphasis: the costumes and manners of his characters are, without seeming effort (much less caricature), exactly *right*; the atmosphere is persuasive yet unobtrusive. Into this setting, Becker and his co-writer Jacques Companeez have imagined a love story of classic simplicity. The script is economical to the point of austerity and almost perfectly "shaped": the ruthless operations of the gang are shown only in so far as they present an obstacle for the lovers; the details of the police investigation (which are not very convincing) are hardly gone into; the relationship between Marie and Manda is before us in every foot of the film. Becker has been well served by his cameraman and art director and has himself cut the film to a rare tautness and precision. And the acting is superb: the rich, sensuous Marie of Simone Signoret contrasts and complements Reggiani's intense unselfish performance and the minor players (particularly Raymond Bussières) maintain an exceptionally high standard.

A comparison between *Le Jour se Lève* and *Casque d'Or*—the similarity of theme, for one thing, suggests it—would provide fertile matter for a study of the development of the French cinema since 1939. More immediately and directly concerned with its human relationships (less with their social implications), and nowhere tainted with the characteristic pre-war pessimism, *Casque d'Or* takes its place beside Carné's film among the masterpieces of the French cinema.

K.R.

*Suitability: A.*

Oct. '52