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CAST

CoreyAlain Delon
JansenYves Montand
Captain Mattei André Bourvil
Vogel.....Gian Maria Volonté
Santi François Périer
The fencePaul Crauchet
Prison guard..... Pierre Collet
RicoAndré Ekyan
Examining magistrate.Yves Arcanal
Chief of police..... René Berthier
Santi's sonJean-Marc Boris
Chief of Internal AffairsPaul Amiot

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director/ScreenwriterJean-Pierre Melville
ProducerRobert Dorfmann
Cinematographer.....Henri Decaë
EditorMarie-Sophie Dubus
Sound.....Jean Nény, Jacques Carrère
Music Eric De Marsen
Sets.....Théo Meurisse
Costumes.....Colette Baudot
Cameraman.....Charles-Henri Montel
Script supervisor.....Jacqueline Decaë
Production manager..... Alain Queffélec
Assistant director.....Bernard Stora

Film restoration (2002).....Brigitte Dutray, Michel Rocher (StudioCanal)
Subtitles (2002).....Lenny Borger

Filmed in Paris, Marseilles, Chalon-sur-Saône and at Boulogne Studios

Principal photography: January – April 1970 Paris release: October 20, 1970

Color Aspect ratio: 1.85:1

Running time: 140 minutes

A Films Corona (Paris) / Selenia (Rome) co-production

**A JOHN WOO PRESENTATION
RELEASED BY RIALTO PICTURES**

Pressbook by Lenny Borger

Pressbook Editor: Bruce Goldstein

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THE STORY

Captain Mattei (Bourvil) of the Quai des Orfèvres¹ in Paris has been dispatched to the south of France to pick up and bring back by night train a dangerous criminal named Vogel (Volonté). During the night, Vogel manages to smash the window of the train compartment and escape. Mattei immediately launches a manhunt across the region, but Vogel is nowhere to be found.

In the meantime, at the Baumettes prison in Marseilles, a guard enters the cell of an inmate named Corey (Delon) and announces he's to be released at dawn. The guard also proposes Corey a "job" that another inmate told him about before dying. Wary, Corey listens, then recovers his personal effects and walks out, a free man, after five years in the pen.

He immediately goes to the home of an old acquaintance, Rico, who has betrayed Corey by making his old girlfriend his mistress. Corey "borrows" money and a revolver, then buys a used car and begins to drive toward Paris. In the vicinity of Chalons, he makes the acquaintance of the fugitive Vogel who has hidden in his car trunk. Vogel cold-bloodedly saves Corey's hide when two of Rico's men ambush him in the forest of Fontainebleau.

Captain Mattei returns to Paris where he is informed in no uncertain terms by his superiors that Vogel must be found. Mattei makes the rounds of his usual ring of informers. He starts with Jacques Santi (Périer), a nightclub owner, who refuses to play the stoolie. But Mattei has a rein on him and knows that sooner or later he'll cooperate.

The next day, Corey, who has moved Vogel into his old apartment, tells his new accomplice about the heist plan the prison guard had tipped him off to. The two men agree to try their luck and decide to take on a third associate, an ex-cop and sharpshooter named Jansen (Montand). Corey phones Jansen, who has become an alcoholic plagued with the DTs, and the two men set a meeting at Santi's club.

While they get acquainted, two policemen arrest Santi and take him to the Quai. Santi still refuses to help Mattei, who holds him under custody for a few days.

Meanwhile, Corey, Vogel and Jansen carefully prepare their robbery of a chic jewelry store on the Place Vendome. Corey makes contact with a fence (Crauchet) while Jansen cases the jeweler's.

Soon everything is ready and the trio goes into action. They pull off the heist without a problem.

Now the problem is to sell off the merchandise.

¹ "Quai des Orfèvres" is the familiar name for the Criminal Investigations Division (*Police judiciaire*) of the Prefecture of Police, located on the street of that name in a complex of buildings housing the Paris law courts (*Palais de Justice*). In popular parlance, "Quai des Orfèvres" means to the French what "Scotland Yard" means to the British. "Quai des Orfèvres" is also the title of a re-discovered 1947 *policier* by Henri-Georges Clouzot, which was re-released in 2002 by Rialto Pictures.

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Corey goes to see the fence, who now refuses the jewels, claiming it's too much for him to handle.

We discover that the entire robbery plan is a trap set by Rico for Corey. When Rico had got wind of Corey's early release, he had sacrificed his own hold-up plans in order to bait Corey and squeal on him. The day after the hold-up, Mattei had received an anonymous letter promising him the information he needed.

Now Mattei goes into action.

Jansen goes to see Santi and ask if he knows a reliable fence. But Mattei has the club owner over a barrel: he has had Santi's son arrested on a phony drug charge and Santi has no choice but to cooperate. He gives Corey the name of a fence... who is none other than Mattei.

Corey, Vogel and Jansen have an appointment with Mattei in the red circle...

JOHN WOO ON "LE CERCLE ROUGE"

Le Cercle Rouge is visually arresting and powerful in its silence. There is not much dialogue and the silence creates a more dramatic cinematic language as it draws more attention to the story and the great moments of the actors' performance. By creating a cool, calm atmosphere with immaculate camerawork and precise editing rhythms, his style and message move with his actors as they deliver their soulful performances.

Melville's themes embody the spirit of honor, loyalty, and tragic destiny among characters played by fate. These classic themes are also found in ancient Chinese and Japanese philosophies and cultures². I believe in this kind of romanticism. These valuable lessons of spiritual morality draw me into his movies and make me feel like we are in the same world. The romantic values of friendship and brotherhood expressed in this movie are almost impossible to find today. They are another reason why *Le Cercle Rouge* became a classic gangster film.

There is no mistaking that *Le Cercle Rouge* is a Jean-Pierre Melville movie, as all of the elements synchronize to his vision. Melville was the coolest, most stylish auteur of his time. I've long admired him for his spirit and his movies. He's had a great influence on my work. -- John Woo, December 2002

"I have never fired a gun in my life. I learned how to hold a gun, and subsequently taught my actors, by watching Alain Delon in the films of Jean-Pierre Melville."
-- John Woo, in a 1992 interview

² Critic Henry Chapier in the French newspaper *Combat* also noted the similarity between Melville and Asian filmmakers. See excerpt from his 1970 review on the following page.

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WHAT THE FRENCH CRITICS SAID...

"Perfection! The word has been used so often to describe Melville's films that it's become hackneyed. We'll have to find a new, stronger, adjective. Perfection of the heist. This old chestnut of crime movies here becomes a sequence you think you're seeing for the first time. Perfection of the action. We know how painstaking in his conviction and patience he is when working out his plots and shooting scripts. Perfection of color. And, last but not least, perfection of acting. It bears repeating: *Le Cercle Rouge*? A perfect circle."

-- Jacques Fluor, *Paris Jour*, Oct. 23, 1970

"Why is it that this model of dark intrigue holds us spellbound? Because behind his tale of dark deeds and brutality, Melville superbly interweaves his secret themes: solitude, friendship, betrayal and degeneration. He uses the clash of cops and robbers to deal with what is grandiose and murky in mankind. And if one dares use the word "tragedy," it's less because of the painstaking dramatic mechanisms than because of the glimpse we have of the lost, primitive souls of these heroes with deadpan faces."

-- François Nourissier, *L'Express*, Oct./Nov. 1970

"As early as *Le Doulos*, we realized that Melville's purpose had nothing to do with the American action movie to which he is always being compared: a marvelously resourceful film craftsman, Jean-Pierre Melville aims much higher than the perfectionism of the professional: in their rhythm and scope, his films are the equal of the best of Fuller or Hawks, but Melville's soul lies elsewhere, in poetry, in dreams. So we must also compare him to the great Japanese masters because his characters are always inhabited, they claim our interest because they have an inner life, a shadow zone, a secret... This patrician cinema, over which the shadow of death hovers haughtily, is a purely Asian cinema, a cinema of total contemplation."

-- Henry Chapier, *Combat*, Oct. 22, 1970

"Only Melville could recreate this strange universe, of unreal images, of misty landscapes." -- Jean Tulard, *Guides des Films*

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MELVILLE ON " LE CERCLE ROUGE "

Jean-Pierre Melville, interviewed by Rui Nogueira for his book "Melville on Melville" (Viking Press, 1971)

How do you feel about your twelfth film, Le Cercle Rouge?

Since there's no knowing if there will be a thirteenth, I have to talk about *Le Cercle Rouge* as though it were not only my "latest" film — as you say when you've just completed a picture — but also my "last film."³ Which in turn obliges me to speak about my filmmaking career as a whole, as well as my life as a spectator. Maybe I won't want to make any more films. That could happen, supposing fate decreed that I wasn't to be allowed to rebuild my studios here⁴, and I decided to go live in America, not to make films there, but to write. So I really am obliged at this point to take stock of 25 years of professional activity and some 45 years activity as a moviegoer. I'll begin by being hard on myself before moving on to other people. Then I'll talk about the film, but also about what it's like working on a film surrounded by people who haven't at all the same reasons for being involved in it, for living in it, while it's being made.

All right, then. If I look at myself very objectively, I realize that I've become *impossible*. Not egocentric (I'm not in the least egocentric) but— if I may be allowed to coin a word— opocentric ('opo', from opus). As I grow older, in other words, nothing matters except my profession and therefore my work, by which I mean the work on hand, which I think about day and night and which takes precedence over everything, I repeat *everything*, else in my thoughts. I'm not talking about my affections, of course. So, I begin thinking about the film I'm working on as soon as I wake up in the morning —and I'm always working on one, even if I'm not actually shooting—and only when I go to sleep at night do I stop thinking about it. That's pretty extreme, and I was made aware of it last night. I was having dinner with Léo Fortel at a Vietnamese restaurant, and at the next table there were two girls and two guys. One of the two men was obviously part-French, part-Indo-Chinese . . . and opposite him was a ravishing Asian girl, I think she must have been of mixed parentage, with extraordinary hair — probably a wig — pitch-black, in Joan of Arc style but longer -- and the magnificent face. I was staring at her throughout the meal, but when Leo asked me if I wanted him to get her name and address, I said no. "Really?" he said, "but why not?" "Because I don't have a film in mind with her." I said. And I realized that beautiful women interest me only in so far as I can use them in a film. You see how far it's gone?

Le Cercle Rouge is by far the toughest movie I've ever done, because I worked the plot out myself and I didn't do myself any favors in writing it. I said to myself, "This is going to be difficult to shoot, but I don't care, I want to do it." And I did film what I had written. But instead of completing it in 50 days, which would have been normal, it took me 66 days.

What is *Le Cercle Rouge*? *Le Cercle Rouge*, to my mind, is first and foremost a heist story. It's about two professional crooks (Delon and Volonté) and another man (Montand) who is a sort of unplanned helper.

³ Melville would make one more film, *Un Flic*, also starring Alain Delon, in 1971.

⁴ Melville's studios on Rue Jenner in Paris had burned down in June, 1967.

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As I've told you, I wanted to write a heist script long before I saw *The Asphalt Jungle*, before I'd even heard of it, and well before things like *Rififi*⁵. I think I also told you that I was supposed to make *Rififi*? No? Well, I was the person who got the producer to buy the rights, he announced that I was to direct the film, and then I didn't see him again for six months. Finally the film was made by [Jules] Dassin, who had the extreme courtesy to say that he would do it only if I wrote to tell him that I was happy about the arrangement. Which I did.

So I've wanted to 'do a robbery' since about 1950, around the time I finished [Cocteau's] *Les Enfants Terribles*. I'd like *Le Cercle Rouge* to be masterly, of course, but I don't know yet if it will be; I think the elements are sufficiently interesting to make a good set-piece, and time will tell if I've set the robbery in the right context or not. It's also a sort of digest of all the thriller films I have made previously, and I haven't made things easy for myself in any way. For instance, there are no women in the film; and it certainly isn't taking the easy way out to make a thriller with five leading characters, none of whom is a woman.

Is Le Cercle Rouge one of the 22 scripts destroyed when your studio burned down?

No. Actually, with my memory, I could have taken any one of those scripts and re-written it down to the last comma. But if I had, I would have come up with something different. I don't like to repeat myself. I will never film those burned scripts, because I wouldn't want to do them now even if I still had them in my drawer -- which doesn't mean that I won't often use ideas from those scripts, as I in fact did for the relationship between the head of Internal Affairs and Captain Mattei in *Le Cercle Rouge*.

The *Cercle Rouge* script is an original in the sense that it was written by me and by me alone, but it won't take you long to realize it's a transposed Western, with the action taking place in Paris instead of the West, in the present day rather than after the Civil War, and with cars instead of horses. So I start off with the traditional -- almost obligatory -- conventional situation: the man just released from jail. And this man corresponds pretty much to the cowboy who, once the opening credits are over, pushes open the doors of a saloon.

Originally you had a different cast in mind, didn't you?

Yes. Captain Mattei, who is played by André Bourvil and played beautifully -- was a part originally intended for Lino Ventura. The ex-cop Jansen, turned crook and alcoholic, was to have been played by Paul Meurisse, and not Yves Montand. And I had thought of offering Belmondo the role of Vogel, finally played by Gian Maria Volonté. I think that if Delon hadn't wanted to do *Borsalino* with Belmondo, I would have got them both together in *Le Cercle Rouge*. ... But every film is what it is, and it stands or falls by its own merits. A film is a moment out of one's life. In my case at least. Remember, it represents 14 months of uninterrupted work squeezed into twelve -- 1968 was a completely wasted year for me, because I'd signed a contract with the Hakim brothers to make *La Chienne*⁶ and they found a way not to honor it. They made me lose a whole

⁵ John Huston's *The Asphalt Jungle* (1950) features a memorable heist sequence. The tour-de-force heist sequence in Jules Dassin's *Rififi* (*Du Rififi chez les hommes*, 1955) lasts 30 minutes, with no dialogue or music. Disappointed at not making *Rififi*, Melville consoled himself by making *Bob Le Flambeur* (1956) in collaboration with *Rififi* author Auguste Le Breton.

⁶ This would have been a re-make of the 1931 Renoir classic starring Michel Simon.

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year immediately following the fire at my studios, which was a terrible blow in a lot of ways; because losing the studios and all they represented in terms of money and opportunities was bad enough, but then to be reduced to 12 months of unemployment by a contract retaining exclusive rights over your services and preventing you from doing anything else whatsoever— that is a terrible blow. So, those 14 months of work squeezed into 12, because in 1966 I made *Le Deuxieme Souffle*, in 1967 I made *Le Samourai*, in 1968 I did nothing, in 1969 I did *Army of Shadows*, and in 1970, *Le Cercle Rouge*. Well, when you reach my age, you're entitled to think that a film is an important thing in your life, because it represents at least a year's work and then dogs you for another year: you remain the man of last year's film, or of your last film shown. So in fact a film may be said to take up two years of your life.

In the shooting script for Le Cercle Rouge, when Captain Mattei is hunting Vogel after his escape, you have him say: "He isn't Claude Tenne. I couldn't ask the Minister of the Interior to block every road in France." Who is this Claude Tenne?

Claude Tenne was a member of the OAS, and during the Algerian crisis he was tried and imprisoned for his anti-government activities. He managed to escape from the prison on the Ile de Ré by folding himself into four and hiding inside a military trunk, a sort of big iron trunk, though not so very big actually -- I have no idea how he did it. And at the time roadblocks were set up all over France.

At another point in the script, you describe Jansen as follows: "Jansen, stretched out on his bed, fully dressed, filthy, unshaven, with a three day beard. Like Faulkner in one of his alcoholic bouts."

Yes, I imagine Faulkner or Hemingway as being like that in their bouts of alcoholism. As a matter of fact I think there are many eyewitness accounts of how Faulkner sometimes used to stay shut up in his room with his bottles for a week with orders that he wasn't to be disturbed.

But Jansen's hallucinations—rats and spiders crawling slowly towards him—are the sort of nightmares Edgar Allan Poe might have dreamed up?

Well, of course. You know that Poe and Melville have a great deal in common . . . But now I'm getting mixed up, forgetting when I say Melville that it's not me, but the great...⁷

Could you tell us about your working relationship with the cast of Le Cercle Rouge?

Of course, I had an excellent relationship with Delon during shooting. We have an extraordinary personal understanding which enables us to work in a very special way.

This was the first time I worked with Yves Montand, who is a very fine actor, but he comes from the music hall and that's what sets him apart from Delon. Delon is enormously gifted and doesn't need as much preparation as Montand, who is a perfectionist like me. Montand is the sort of actor who arrives on set in the morning with the whole thing in his head. Everything went beautifully with him, too -- he's enormously willing and dedicated. If you want proof, consider what he's just been doing in [Costa Gavras's] *The Confession*. This man, known to the whole world as a

⁷ He's of course referring to the great American novelist Herman Melville, after whom the director named himself.

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Communist, has had the courage to accept the role in *The Confession* of a character who accuses the Communist regime of having committed inconceivable crimes....Anyhow, it was marvelous working with Montand, and I hope to make many more films with him. In the first place because he's a man of about my age — he's three years my junior, actually —so he's easier for me to use as a vehicle than a much younger actor. Alain and Jean-Paul [Belmondo], let's say, are vehicle-characters for me because they are 35 years old, and if I give Delon a moustache, that's it, he's the man, not just a nice-looking young man, but the man. Handsome, maybe, but it doesn't matter because it no longer gets in the way. Anyway, to my mind, Montand is also handsome.

André Bourvil is an excellent actor, one of the best in France, but he probably isn't *a priori* a Melvillian actor. I think he gives a very fine performance in my film, and I'm all the more convinced of this after going through the whole film again on the cutting table: there are moments where Bourvil is absolutely staggering. In his case I'm very happy about the casting change, because Bourvil brings an element of humanity to the part which I hadn't expected and Lino Ventura certainly wouldn't have provided. Lino Ventura would have been "The Police Captain," and there would have been no surprises. Whereas with Bourvil -- thanks to Bourvil -- there are quite a few.

As for François Périer, there's really nothing more to be said. Everyone knows he's one of our finest actors. I remember the evening I met you outside a cinema where they were playing *Le Samourai*, and we both exclaimed together, "Périer is fantastic!" This film can add only a little to his reputation. The astonishing thing, though -- and it's one of the distressing aspects of this business -- is that at this moment François Périer isn't rated as a star and he should be. This upsets me, just as it upsets me that Richard Boone⁸ isn't a star. But in this area it's still the distributor who lays down the law and not the filmmaker... Distributors won't take the risk. They always say, "No, no, think of the billing, use name actors, etc." I think it's a pity you can't even think of making an expensive film, costing say a billion old Francs, with unknowns. I could make a film tomorrow with unknowns if it cost three hundred million, but not a billion. They'll pay out three hundred million on my name because they know more or less what sort of merchandise they'll get from me, but they won't give me more. The billion for *Le Cercle Rouge* was possible because I had Delon, Bourvil and Montand, and because there was a sizeable Italian co-production interest since I was using an Italian actor, Gian Maria Volonté — totally unknown in France, I might add, whom I'd had in mind to play Vogel after seeing him in Carlo Lizzani's *Banditi a Milano*.

If you want me to talk about Gian Maria Volonté, that's a very different story. Because Gian Maria Volonté is an instinctive actor, and he may well be a great stage actor in Italy, he may even be a great Shakespearean actor, but for me he was absolutely impossible in that on a French set, in a film such as I was making, he never at any moment made me feel I was dealing with a professional. He didn't know how to place himself for the lighting -- he didn't understand that an inch to the left or to the right wasn't at all the same thing. "Look at Delon, look at Montand," I used to tell him, "see how they position themselves perfectly for the lights, etc. etc." I also think the fact that he is very involved in politics (he's a leftist, as he never tires of telling you) did nothing to bring us together. He was very proud of having gone to sit-in at the Odeon during the "glorious" days of May-June 1968; personally, I didn't go to sit-in at the Odeon. It

⁸American character actor Richard Boone (1917-1981) appeared in over 50 films, but was best known for his 50s/60s tv series "Have Gun Will Travel."

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seems, too, that whenever he had a weekend free he flew back to Italy. That's what I call a super-nationalist spirit. I once said to him, "It's no use dreaming of becoming an international star so long as you continue to pride yourself on being Italian — which is of no consequence, any more than being French is." But for him everything Italian was marvelous and wonderful, and everything French was ridiculous. I remember one day, we were setting up a rear-projection scene and he was smiling to himself. I asked him why, and he said, "Because . . . you've seen *Banditi a Milano*? There are no rear projections in *Banditi a Milano*. Everything was shot direct inside a moving car." "Really?" I said, "And were you shooting night scenes like this? Were you inside a car filming the action going on outside at night?" "Well, no," he said, and it seemed to sink in that we weren't using rear projection just to amuse him. He's a strange character. Very wearying. I can tell you, I won't be making any more films with Gian Maria Volonté.

Can you draw any conclusions from these 12 films you've made since 1947?

In these 23 years, or let's say these 25 years, because after all it was in 1945 that I founded my production company: I was demobilized in October 1945, and formed the company on 5 November 1945 -- in these 25 years of professionalism I've done lots of things. First, in 1947, I got the idea of building my own studios, which I did. At one point I was the only filmmaker in the world to have his own studios. This period lasted from 1949, when I made *Les Enfants Terribles*, till 1967—18 years in all, with a short break when I gave the studios up for a time before being able to rebuild them as I wanted. Then in June 1967, they burned down. Nothing much remains, but I am rebuilding them, even though I haven't received the permit yet from the city of Paris. So parallel to the films I have made . . . well, in an article I received yesterday, there's a sentence that reads, "... the novel *Le Silence de la Mer*, which was adapted for the screen by the father of the new French cinema, Jean-Pierre Melville." This was published in the Algerian newspaper *El Moudjahid*, by the critic Ahmazid Deboukalfa. I don't know this man except by name, but I'm delighted to know that someone outside France remembers from time to time that it was Melville, after all, who shook things up in 1947.

Then in 1957 I built a screening room on the rue Washington, along with editing rooms, but since leasing out screening space and editing rooms isn't my business, I sold my interest. However, I've always felt the need for some parallel creative activity, in building and materials, because cinema isn't created with ideas alone. There's the whole mechanical side of it, and of course projection. For instance, during the three years my studios were leased out to Pathé-Marconi, I couldn't stand not having my own screening room, so I built one which I leased out to other people, but could use myself in the evenings to run through any films I wanted to see. This sort of thing will always happen with me. At the moment I'm ruining myself in advance to create a screening room here in the rue Jenner which is going to be marvelous because if, for instance, Monsieur Cocteau of Fox were to lend me a print of *The Kremlin Letter* tomorrow morning, what a joy it would be to screen it here during the morning and then return it to the Balzac Cinema at 1.30 p.m. in time for the first show.

I don't know what will be left of me 50 years from now. I suspect that all films will have aged terribly and that the cinema probably won't even exist any more. My guess is that the final disappearance of cinemas will take place around the year 2020, so in 50 years time there will be nothing but television. Well, I would be happy if I get one line in the "Great Universal Dictionary of the Cinema," and I think that's the sort of ambition every filmmaker must have. This is a business in which you have to be, not *arriviste*, certainly

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not that, nor yet ambitious, which I'm not, but you have to have ambition in what you do, which isn't at all the same thing. I'm not ambitious, I don't want to be something; I have always been what I am, I haven't become anything; but I've always had, and I shall always try to retain, this feeling that ambition in one's work is an absolutely healthy, justifiable thing. You can't make films just for the sake of making films. If fate wills that I should make more films, I'll try to remain faithful to this ideal of being ambitious when I start a film; not being ambitious between films, but being ambitious when I start work, telling myself, "People have to enjoy this." That's my ambition: to fill cinemas.

JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE (writer/director)

Jean-Pierre Melville was born Jean-Pierre Grumbach in Paris in 1917, the son of a wholesale merchant. (He would later adopt the name Melville in homage to the author of *Moby Dick*.) His father gave him a 9.5mm movie camera when he was six years old and he graduated to 16mm when he was 12. An avid moviegoer in his childhood and youth, his other passions were the theater, the circus and the music hall. Like the New Wave generation which would consider him a mentor, Melville learned about cinema mostly by watching the films of others, preferably Hollywood directors.

Melville started his military service in 1937 and was still in uniform when the war broke out. Information on his activities during the early years of the Occupation are contradictory, but he fled to England in 1943, where he joined the British Army, then the Free French, with whom he took part in the invasion of Italy and the liberation of Lyons.

Demobilized in October 1945, Melville was determined to be a filmmaker. But the doors to the heavily corporate industry remained closed to him. Unable to get a professional card, Melville created his own production company. After a documentary short about the famous circus clown Beby, he wrote, produced, directed and edited *Le Silence de la mer*, an austere, strikingly faithful adaptation of the famous French Resistance novel, secretly published in 1942. It brought him the grudging respect of the film industry—which still fined him heavily for shooting without a permit. The film also launched the career of his great director of photography, Henri Decaë.

Melville also drew praise from none other than Jean Cocteau, who entrusted him with the film adaptation to his famous 1929 novel, *Les Enfants terribles* (1950). Although Cocteau worked on the screenplay and imposed the casting of his then-lover, Edouard Dhermitte, Melville made it very much his own film. It influenced several of the later New Wave directors, Truffaut and Chabrol in particular.

The next few years were lean ones for Melville. He made *Quand tu liras cette lettre* (1953), an implausible melodrama starring Juliette Greco, which he agreed to do to prove he was not a cinematic dilettante or art house intellectual.

Melville entertained hopes of directing *Rififi*, promised to him by the producer, who finally passed him over in favor of expat American Jules Dassin. Nonetheless, the success of *Rififi* allowed him to make *Bob Le Flambeur*, for which he obtained the collaboration of *Rififi* author Auguste Le Breton.

Melville himself acted in his next film, *Deux hommes à Manhattan* (1958), a tale of two French journalists investigating the disappearance of a diplomat in New York, which

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was partially shot on location. His next film, *Léon Morin, prêtre* (1961), starred New Wave sensation Jean-Paul Belmondo as an enlightened young Catholic priest.

Le Doulos (1962) was the first of his highly stylized appropriations of film noir conventions and stereotypes, which again cast Belmondo. That same year Melville filmed his adaptation of Georges Simenon's novel *L'Ainé des Ferchaux* (1962), which co-starred Belmondo and the great character actor Charles Vanel.

The gangster epic *Le Deuxième souffle* (*Second Breath*, 1966), with Lino Ventura as one of the great Melvillian heroes, came next. He followed that a year later with *Le Samourai* (1967), a hieratic thriller about a betrayed contract killer, played with icy, impenetrable grace by Alain Delon. Melville then paid a moving homage to the heroism and sacrifice of the French Resistance in *Army of Shadows* (*L'Armée des ombres*, 1969), starring Lino Ventura, Simone Signoret, and Paul Meurisse. Melville's next film proved to be the greatest hit of his career: *Le Cercle Rouge* (1970), a fatalistic caper drama with Delon, Yves Montand and Gian-Marie Volonté as three outlaws and beloved funnyman André Bourvil in one of his few straight dramatic roles as the pursuing cop.

Melville's last film was another thriller with Delon, *Un Flic* (1972), which co-starred Catherine Deneuve and met with only partial success. Melville was at work on the script of his 14th feature when he died suddenly of a stroke on August 2, 1973. He was 55.

Melville's maverick status within the French film industry and his then unorthodox methods of independent production (which even included his own facility, Jenner Studios, in southern Paris, where he shot the interiors for most of his films) served as a model and inspiration for many of the New Wave directors. Many later-day directors, among them John Woo, have openly declared their debt to Melville.

In *Breathless*, Jean-Luc Godard paid special tribute to Melville. In one scene, a cop tells Jean-Paul Belmondo that his friend Bob Montagné is in jail -- a reference to the title character of *Bob Le Flambeur*. *Breathless* also boasts a memorable cameo appearance by Melville himself, as the pretentious best-selling novelist interviewed by Jean Seberg:

Seberg: "What is your greatest ambition in life?"

Melville: To become immortal... and then die."

HENRI DECAË (cinematographer)

Hailed as one of the two great cinematographers of the French New Wave (along with Raoul Coutard), Henri Decaë shot all but one of Jean-Pierre Melville's 13 feature films, beginning with *Le Silence de la mer* (which he also co-edited with the director). Born outside Paris in 1915, Decaë, like Melville, had a camera at early age and was making amateur movies in his teens. He studied at one of France's first film schools, the ETCP, and directed, photographed and edited documentary and industrial shorts and publicity films before, during and after the war. Decaë's technical mastery and pictorial perfectionism so impressed the new generation of French directors of the late 50s that he was sought out by Louis Malle, Claude Chabrol, and François Truffaut to lens their first feature films (respectively *Elevator to the Gallows*, *Le Beau Serge*, and *The 400 Blows*, 1958). His other major credits of this heady period included René Clément's *Purple Noon* (starring Alain Delon), Serge Bourguignon's *Sundays and Cybèle*, and Losey's *Eva*. Though remaining faithful to Melville, he gradually moved into the less adventurous mainstream, working with such local box office favorites as Gérard Oury, Henri Verneuil, Claude Zidi and Georges Lautner and Hollywood directors such as

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Sidney Pollack (*Castle Keep* and *Bobby Deerfield*), George Stevens (*The Only Game in Town*), Robert Wise (*Two People*), Franklin J. Schaffner (*The Boys from Brazil*), Lewis Gilbert (*Seven Men at Daybreak*), and James Toback (*Exposed*). He died in 1987.

ALAIN DELON (Corey)

Delon's extraordinary, multi-faceted career (actor, producer, director, businessman) has shuttled continually between the mainstream and the art house. A one-time paratrooper in the Indochinese War and porter in the Les Halles food market, Delon (born 1935) came to the cinema almost by chance, and without any training, in 1957. The first major turning point in his career came in 1960 when he starred in René Clément's *Purple Noon* and Luchino Visconti's *Rocco and His Brothers*. Antonioni then cast him in *The Eclipse* and his mentor Visconti used him again in *The Leopard*. He was teamed with screen patriarch Jean Gabin in Henri Verneuil's gangster opus *Any Number Can Win* (*Melodie en sous-sol*) before becoming the quintessential Melville icon in *Le Samourai*, *Le Cercle Rouge*, and *Un Flic*. Delon followed Melville's lead by directing commercial thrillers himself in the early 1980s. As a producer-actor, Delon's major credits include Jacques Deray's *Borsalino*, Joseph Losey's *Mr. Klein* and Bertrand Blier's *Notre histoire*, for which he won a César Award. Other memorable Delon titles include Deray's *La Piscine* (co-starring his then on-and-off-screen partner, Romy Schneider), Losey's *The Assassination of Trotsky* and Volker Schlöndorff's *Swann in Love*. Delon was one of Europe's biggest box office attractions from the 1960s through the 80s, though his flirtation with American and international pictures in the mid-60s was as brief as it was unmemorable; in this country, he remains best known for his work in art films.

YVES MONTAND (Jansen)

One of France's great *chansonniers*, Montand (born Ivo Livi in Italy in 1921 and raised in Marseilles) was an up-and-coming singer in 1946 when his mentor, Edith Piaf, cast him in one of her rare film vehicles, *Etoile sans lumière*. Screen stardom was visited upon him suddenly and unwisely that same year when Marcel Carné chose him as an eleventh hour replacement for Jean Gabin in his ill-fated post-Liberation drama, *Les Portes de la nuit*. The film, (in which Montand, too young and inexperienced to fill Gabin's shoes, sang *Autumn Leaves* for the first time) was a resounding flop and Montand was consigned to motion picture oblivion until Henri-Georges Clouzot cast him opposite Charles Vanel in his hit thriller *The Wages of Fear*, which made him the star he would remain until his death in 1991. Despite an unconvincing Hollywood career in the late 50s-early 60s, Montand would become an international star in several of Costa-Gavras's successful political thrillers, notably *Z* and *The Confession*, in which Montand courageously denounced the communist ideal he had publicly shared with his wife, Simone Signoret. Montand subsequently scored personal successes under the direction of Claude Sautet (*César and Rosalie*), Alain Corneau and Jean-Paul Rappeneau and most notably as the conniving Provencal patriarch in Claude Berri's twin Marcel Pagnol adaptations, *Jean de Florette* and *Manon of the Spring*.

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FRANÇOIS PÉRIER (Santi)

One of the finest character actors of the French stage and screen, Périer, born François Pillu in Paris in 1919, began his screen career in 1938, notably with his sensitive, humorous portrait of a young homosexual in Marcel Carné's *Hotel du Nord*. At ease in a wide variety of genres and roles, from comic wimps (the love-struck bourgeois cynically exploited by Louis Jouvet in Christian-Jaque's *Un Revenant*) to terrifying gangsters and cynical predators (most memorably as the sleazy suitor Oscar in Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*), Périer rarely struck a false note. Among his other major films: René Clair's *Le Silence est d'or*, Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus*, René Clement's *Gervaise*, Philippe de Broca's *The Five-Day Lover*, Melville's *Le Samourai*, Costa Gavras's *Z*, Claude Sautet's *Max et les ferraillers*, Alain Resnais's *Stavisky*, etc. He had an equally successful stage career. Périer died in June 2002.

ANDRÉ BOURVIL (Captain Mattei)

Known simply under the pseudonym "Bourvil," this one-time music hall and radio performer (born André Raimbourg in 1917) is best remembered for the tandem he formed with Louis de Funès under the direction of Gérard Oury: their two major comedies, *Le Corniaud* and *La Grande vadrouille* (1965 and 1966), remain two of the biggest French box office successes of all time. Bourvil, whose first film appearance dates from the Occupation years, landed one of his first major screen roles in Henri-Georges Clouzot's film of the popular stage farce *Miquette et sa mère*. Displaying a genuine dramatic sensibility, Bourvil won the Best Actor award at the 1956 Venice Film Festival for his serio-comic portrayal of a black marketeer during the Occupation, in Claude Autant-Lara's *La Traversée de Paris*. He followed this triumph playing a convincing Thenardier to Jean Gabin's Jean Valjean in the atrocious 1957 color remake of *Les Misérables* and co-starred as Michèle Morgan's small-minded, uncomprehending husband in André Cayatte's *The Mirror Has Two Faces*. *Le Cercle Rouge* would be his last film. He died in 1970.

GIAN MARIA VOLONTÉ (Vogel)

An active Leftist, Volonté (b. 1933) was naturally drawn to politically-minded films and filmmakers. He enjoyed one of his earliest personal successes as a Sicilian anti-Mafia union leader in the Taviani Brothers' *Un Uomo da bruciare*. His association with directors Elio Petri and Francesco Rosi gave him many of his richest roles, notably Petri's *We Still Kill the Old Way*, *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* and *The Working Class Goes to Heaven* and Rosi's *Uomini Contro*, *The Mattei Affair*, *Lucky Luciano* and *Christ Stopped at Eboli*. Volonté also played the villain in Sergio Leone's groundbreaking spaghetti westerns *A Fistful of Dollars* (under the pseudonym John Wells) and its sequel *For a Few Dollars More*, which brought him a more popular following. He died in 1994.

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RIALTO PICTURES

Founded in 1997 by Bruce Goldstein, Rialto Pictures specializes in theatrical re-releases of classic films and has recently entered the first-run market with *Murderous Maids*. Rialto's first two releases, co-distributed by Strand Releasing, were Mike Nichols' *The Graduate* and Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt*. In 1998, Adrienne Halpern joined Rialto as a partner with Goldstein.

Rialto has distinguished itself with a large slate of film classics in excellent new prints, including acclaimed restorations of Carol Reed's *The Third Man*, Renoir's *Grand Illusion*, and Fellini's *Nights of Cabiria*.

In 2000, Rialto had an enormous success with the re-release of Jules Dassin's classic of French film noir, *Rififi*, and celebrated the centennial of Luis Buñuel with re-releases of *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* and *Diary of a Chambermaid*. Rialto also had a hit that year with its re-release of John Schlesinger's British New Wave classic *Billy Liar*, starring Tom Courtenay and Julie Christie.

Rialto's 2001 re-releases included Jean-Pierre Melville's *Bob Le Flambeur*, Buñuel's *That Obscure Object of Desire*, Fellini's *Juliet of the Spirits*, and Godard's long-unseen *Band of Outsiders*, starring Anna Karina.

Rialto's 2002 releases included the company's first first-run film: Jean-Pierre Denis' *Murderous Maids*, with Sylvie Testud giving a critically-acclaimed performance. Rialto's other 2002 releases included a new restoration of Vittorio de Sica's neo-realist classic *Umberto D.*; *Pépé Le Moko*, Julien Duvivier's masterwork of French romanticism starring Jean Gabin; and the original film version of Mel Brooks' *The Producers*.

In addition to *Le Cercle Rouge*, Rialto's current re-releases include Henri-Georges Clouzot's re-discovered film noir masterwork *Quai des Orfèvres* and Buñuel's surrealist comedy *The Phantom of Liberty*.

In 1999, Rialto received a special "Heritage Award" from the National Society of Film Critics. In 2000, Rialto received a special award from the New York Film Critics for its re-release of *Rififi*, presented to Goldstein and Halpern by Jeanne Moreau.