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# FROM 'ALL GUNS AND GANGSTERS' - DAVID AUSTEN

he plans to come over to London to make a film with Dick Lester, which he will direct with Lester as producer.

Meanwhile . . . the 'Battle of Borsalino' raged on. Delon's own company, Adel Productions, produced the film and Belmondo claims that when he signed the contract to play in *Borsalino* it stated clearly that the two stars would receive exactly equal billing above the title, and that anyway he would have final approval on all publicity. Out came the giant posters, stuck all over Paris, with Belmondo's name to the left and Delon's on the right and then the title . . . but on the far side in smaller lettering was clearly added 'presented by Alain Delon'. Belmondo was furious that his co-star should have his name mentioned twice on the publicity and started legal action against Adel. Of course, the press picked it up immediately . . . there were interviews and photo-coverage in all the popular rags. Belmondo made a very clear statement that he was still friendly with Delon but that he was forced to sue the company over the principle that it had broken the contract . . . he felt that if he let it go then what safety would other actors have in their dealings with the film companies. It all added to the flames of an already well-fired campaign, but the matter was finally settled out of court.

Inevitably, after all the fuss and clamour, the film proves somewhat disappointing. To begin with, *Borsalino* seems a rather unlikely subject for Jacques Deray,

who has previously been over-rated for *Symphonie pour un massacre* and perhaps also for *La piscine*. It traces the rise of two young hoods to the top of the gangster empire in Marseilles during the 'thirties. It would appear to be a knowledgeable pastiche of its American forerunners, but as the film itself reveals there is a wide gulf between the affectionate tribute and a straightforward 'crib'. There is often an uncomfortable tension between the lighthearted approach to the escapades of the two young men and the savage impact of their consequences . . . the almost musical mood is suddenly splattered with blood. This difficult balancing act between moods might have been sustained in *Bonnie and Clyde*, but not here. And the meticulously researched setting for the story somehow just doesn't come off with conviction.

On the credit side are the performances; whatever are their current off-screen differences both Belmondo and Delon make sympathetic characters out of the two ambitious gangsters . . . right the way down the line, Delon underplays and complements Belmondo's exuberance. The colour photography is excellent, but I should point out that the print shown at the Paramount in Paris is of a quality denied to British cinemagoers. Claude Bolling provides a catchy score for the film. It'll have to make a small fortune, even if just to pay for the publicity, and it looks fair set to do so.

Delon, sensibly, is already hard at work

on his next film. This time he co-stars with Yves Montand and Bourvil in a thriller for Jean-Pierre Melville. *Le cercle rouge* is familiar territory for Melville: the perfect robbery (jewels again) that comes unstuck, the duel of wits between the detective and the crooks, ending with their violent deaths.

I met Melville on the set of *Le cercle rouge*. He was wearing his customary outfit of a dark grey business-like suit, tinted dark glasses and a large stetson; which in fact doesn't look quite as incongruous as it sounds. He seemed tired; the night before had been the premiere and party at Maxims for *Borsalino*.

'I have a very special relationship with Alain. Of course he is the cleverest actor in France today . . . and the most beautiful man. We have this rapport, he is like a younger brother . . . or, perhaps, a son.'

Melville is a man who likes to keep himself to himself, and the previous night's party had evidently been a trying experience for him. He fished something out of his wallet to show me—it was Delon's place-card at Maxims and inside it the star had written a message to Melville in English, excusing him from the party if he found it too much of a crush, adding a special note of thanks for everything that Melville had done for him.

Melville obviously values Delon's friendship. He is a soft-spoken and sincere man with a generous and friendly approach that seems quite at odds with the often cold and ruthless surface of his films:





Alain Delon (above) in a scene from Jean-Pierre Melville's latest film, 'Le Cercle Rouge', on which principal photography has just been completed. Right: Delon had presented Melville with a Japanese knife after making 'Le Samourai', but Melville lent it back to him for a scene in the new film

I asked him if he had any particular favourite among the dozen films he had made.

'Not one. I dislike all my old films, because now I can see all the mistakes in them. Even in a film like *Le Samourai*, which I only made a couple of years ago, I can see many faults.'

'How long do you take to prepare a film?'

'A long time. I have spent many, many months on *Le Cercle Rouge*. I first began writing it in March, 1968, and then having completed the first draft I destroyed it. I wrote a second draft but I was still not satisfied so I tore that up. Then I began for a third time . . . when I had completed this final draft I showed it to Alain. This is what we are shooting.'

'Is it just a dialogue script that you write, or do you break it down into individual shots?'

'I plan everything on paper, all the camera angles and movements are written down. I find it absolutely impossible to have imagination when actually on the set.'

Despite this careful pre-planning, which other directors might employ as a means of speeding up their actual shooting, Melville maintained a slow, methodical approach. When I asked him what his rate of progress was, he asked the continuity



girl to bring up a report. She came back with a slip of paper on which was noted: 54 minutes of film in 50 days shooting. Melville gave a sheepish grin. Speed of shooting is obviously not the fastest route to perfection.

'You are the complete *auteur* of your films. Which stage of production do you like working on most?'

'I like it in the middle of the night when I am writing . . . completely alone in my room at three in the morning. This I enjoy. And I love cutting. I have an assistant but I actually do the editing myself. What I do dislike is coming on to the set and shooting the film. You know, if there was another 'me', a twin brother,

I would ask him to take over the work of actually filming the script.'

'You were one of the few film-makers in the world to have your own studios . . .'

'Yes, but unfortunately they got burnt down. So now I am building a new studio. The projection room facilities are complete and in fact I am using them to look at the rushes of *Le Cercle Rouge*, and I shall take the film there for its final editing. The studio should be completely ready for me to make my next production there.'

(I would like to thank Natasha Arnoldi for her patient help and generous co-operation in the preparation of this article —D. Austen.)