



MICHÈLE et LAURENT PÉTIN  
PRÉSENTENT

**DANIEL AUTEUIL  
MONICA BELLUCCI  
MICHEL BLANC  
JACQUES DUTRONC  
ERIC CANTONA**

# le deuxième souffle

UN FILM DE ALAIN CORNEAU

MICHÈLE et LAURENT PÉTIN PRÉSENTENT DANIEL AUTEUIL MONICA BELLUCCI MICHEL BLANC JACQUES DUTRONC ERIC CANTONA DANIEL DUVAL GILBERT MELNI NICOLAS DUVAUCHELLE JACQUES BONNAFFÉ PHILIPPE HANON JEAN-PAUL BONNAIRE LE DEUXIÈME SOUFFLE UN FILM DE ALAIN CORNEAU ADAPTATION ALAIN CORNEAU  
DIALOGUES JOSÉ GIOVANNI ET ALAIN CORNEAU D'APRÈS L'ŒUVRE DE JOSÉ GIOVANNI ÉDITIONS GALLIMARD © 1958 IMAGI YVES ANGELO SON PIERRE GAGNEY LAURENT QUAGLIO GÉRAUD LAMPÉ GÉORGES THIERRY FLAMAND JAC. COSTUMES CORINNE JORRY MONTAGE MARIE-JOÛSÈPHE VOYOTTE MUSIQUE ORIGINALE BRUNO COULAIS DIRECTEUR DE PRODUCTION BERNARD BOLZINGER  
UNE PRODUCTION ARP EN CO-PRODUCTION AVEC TFI FILMS PRODUCTION AVEC LA PARTICIPATION DE CANAL + DE CINECINEMA KIOSQUE SOGECINEMA 4 & SOGECINEMA 5 ET LE SOUTIEN DE LA RÉGION ÎLE-DE-FRANCE EN PRÉFÉRENCE AVEC LE CNC PRODUIT PAR MICHÈLE ET LAURENT PÉTIN RÉALISÉ PAR ALAIN CORNEAU © ARP - TFI FILMS PRODUCTION - 2007

wild bunch

le 6 France

Michèle & Laurent Pétin  
present

# Le deuxième souffle ( Second wind )

A film by  
Alain Corneau

*Based on the novel by*  
José Giovanni  
*Editions Gallimard © 1958*

Running time: 2h35  
Sound : Dolby SRD ~ DTS SR  
Ratio : Cinemascope

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*José Giovanni's novel was first published in 1958.*

*It has always fascinated me as one of the greatest works of the French literary noir tradition.*

*Taking his inspiration from real characters, Giovanni subtly magnifies them and gives them the nobility required to set the fatal mechanism of destiny in motion.*

*He provides us with a magnificent portrait of crushed dignity and gives us a chance to dream.*

*For thirty years now, I have been dreaming of a new "Second Wind".*

*Welcome to this dream...*

Alain Corneau

**SYNOPSIS**

1960. Gu, a famous gangster, has just escaped from jail.

All French police is after him.

Before leaving the country with Manouche, the woman he loves, Gu needs a final job...

## OF... "SECOND WIND"

It all began with a prison, the jail in Melun south of Paris, and a man who, after spending eleven years there, left free but with a criminal record for organized crime. His first visit on the outside was to his lawyer. The latter guessed that his client wished to make a fresh start in life. "Write," he told him. *"I don't mean play at being a writer... Write something like a long letter. A story you've experienced will make writing easier..."*

This advice was not entirely unmotivated. The lawyer, also a literary critic, a theatrical reviewer and a writer in his spare time, had sensed the mark of a true talent in the diary that his client had written during his forty weeks on death row.

It was as if this man, hung-up because his only qualification was a primary school certificate, had been waiting for this. One year later, as a special publication, Gallimard brought out "Le trou" that the author dedicated to Stephen Hecquet, his lawyer. This was the first novel by José Giovanni. Marcel Duhamel subsequently asked him to write for the "Série noire" collection. In his memoirs entitled "Mes grandes gueules", published by Fayard in 2002, José Giovanni wrote:

*"Throw myself into the writing of a new novel? Consider the story first. To my great surprise, I just need to think about it and my characters rise up, love and hate each other, pursuing themselves through my imagination... I'm telling the story of old Gu, given a life sentence after the bullion train attack and who escaped from Castres prison with my friend Bernard Madeleine. Gu is tired, he is afraid to leap from the roof and grab hold of the top of the surrounding wall... The third escapee, the Belgian, misses the top of the wall and crashes to the ground seventy feet below. Dead but free. I describe the fear that Gu, a respected gangland leader, feels squatting on the roof. His weakness inspires me. I'm fond of old Gu. We failed an escape attempt together..."*

Life offered José Giovanni a second chance, one that he then offered to his hero, "old Gu". A man that long years "on the inside" have rendered unfit for the underworld. The gangsters have changed and the cops too. Fearing neither God nor man, whatever side they may be on. No more notion of trust or of honour. Police and thieves have entered an age of quid pro quo and this sickens Gu. He would rather die than become like them. Even though Gu manages to escape twice and pull off a risky heist, he will move inexorably towards his fatal destiny. That is how José Giovanni wanted it.

*"I'm casting old Gu into an underworld transformed by compromise... I enrich him, I cover him with gold. After his second escape, he could easily flee. I lead him towards an end that will save his honour, in a world that cares as much about honour as a penguin cares about an electric radiator... Gu is not part of that world. It betrays him and he takes his leave of it after one final attempt to punish the traitors. He is a wounded*

*man who drags himself across the landing, a gun in each hand, refusing to surrender to the cops, firing round after round at them without any chance of escape, so that they will shoot him dead. A warrior's death."*

A dishonourable life or a heroic death? Giovanni didn't hesitate. He loved what the Robert dictionary defines in the following manner: "Action whose events, through the interplay of certain rules, create inner conflicts in characters dealing with an exceptional destiny." Tragedy. There, the word is out, in all its unavoidable, yet noble aspects.

José Giovanni offered us a signed copy of his novel in 2001. A line in his dedication reads, "*the book, written in '47, was published in '58.*" He was released from prison in '56 where, as he himself confessed, he wrote only a diary of his daily life in the wing for prisoners sentenced to death. So could 1947 have been the year in which he thought up the characters' story? In any case, all of them truly existed and not just Bernard Madeleine, or Chief Inspector Blot, "alias Clot", whom we find in some of his other novels. Reality nourished fiction, as he writes in his memoirs:

*"I know that in actual fact old Gu, caught after escaping from Castres, escaped once more. He was caught and escaped again before being picked up on a beach down south, between the rocks, weak with hunger. The book reached him at the prison in Nîmes. He was doing his life sentence there... It probably made him believe in his final journey as an upstanding desperado. I also wanted him to believe in the love story that I invented for him with Manouche, muse of all the gangland leaders. All these real characters who never met and whom I cast into the same furnace of tragedy..."*

At the end of the novel, José Giovanni has Gu say, just before his last shoot-out: "*Let's get this over with!*" This line became the title of the manuscript that he sent to Marcel Duhamel. Mimi Danzas, one of the assistants working for "La Série Noire" came up with an alternative title: "Le deuxième souffle".

The book was published in 1958. It was a hit with critics and readers. Jean Cocteau wrote to José Giovanni, "*The plot, the language, the nobility, everything is remarkable. It's a sort of masterpiece.*" Jean Rossignol, head of the film rights department with Gallimard, was already considering a film adaptation. While Jacques Becker was getting ready to direct "Le trou", Rossignol told Giovanni, "*Signoret is interested in Manouche. Could Montand play Gu?*" Giovanni would have preferred Charles Vanel who pragmatically turned the offer down: "*Thank you for offering me this, it's a magnificent part, but the others will refuse... Business, deals... The cinema's motto... The main role has to go to a star.*"

A few months later, Jacques Becker passed away, before the release of his last film, "Le trou", that would be a big hit. Claude Sautet was working on "Classe tous risques". Jean Rossignol dreamt of a third adaptation of one of Giovanni's works and started lobbying for an admirer who dreamt of adapting "Le deuxième souffle" for the big screen: Jean-Pierre Melville. On meeting Melville, José Giovanni

expressed his admiration for the director's talent: "Le Silence de la mer is a chanson de geste, hats off to him... His contradiction is an integral part of his talent." However, he felt mistrust for the man: "Melville is a snake charmer. His melodious voice acts as a flute but Jesuitism oozes from him... In his company, I listen more than I speak and that alerts me. I try to understand the way he works, his desire to spellbind people, to possess them. I have a clear vision of a spider in its web."

Even so, he took Jean Rossignol's advice and allowed him to sign the various contracts with Melville. Simone Signoret was approached to play Manouche, while Serge Reggiani would play Gu, something that Giovanni approved of: "Not only is he a talented actor, he resembles Gu physically."

Things were following their normal course when a full-page article appeared in the trade paper "Le Film Français":

"Jean-Pierre Melville is preparing the greatest detective film in the history of French cinema." Giovanni was furious.

"My name and book have vanished. All that remains is Melville the magnificent, Emperor of Rue Jenner, the multi-faceted creator. Beggars, let the prince pass by... I track down Melville and hold the article up before his Turkish delight gaze tinged with comic surprise. Where am I in this?

It's nothing at all, he claims. I just need to wait to see the film's credits to judge his friendship and admiration for me! I decide not to linger, fearing that I will lose all self-control in the face of this smooth talk worthy of an oriental bazaar. I yell at him that he won't make the film and I hurry to call Jean Rossignol. We haven't signed all the contracts. Moreover, Melville's producer has fallen behind with his payments on the novel. I know that an adaptation of the film with another director could prove less brilliant but I don't give a damn. Anything but this Jesuit."

Giovanni considered entrusting "Le Deuxième souffle" to Denys de la Patellière, with a screenplay by Pascal Jardin. Jean-Pierre Melville managed to get shooting of this version blocked by the CNC. Giovanni reacted immediately. "I continue to believe that neither La Patellière nor Jardin have sensed the novel's tempo. In spite of everything, I rush round to the CNC. Melville brandished the initial agreements on the screenplay. But Jean Rossignol has recovered the rights through default of payment. This blocks the mechanism of the cinema. The courts will have to decide..."

A producer named Charles Lombroso then decided to reconcile Melville and Giovanni, backed up by the tireless Jean Rossignol. Giovanni, little by little, agreed to listen to them. "It is high time, in my new life, that I file down my sharp edges. Each of my requests is initially rejected by Melville. Then accepted. The life of young Charlie (his affectionate name for his producer) resembles that of a yoyo. Melville has lifted all the dialogue for his screenplay from my novel and wants to sign it alone. I demand more: I want my name in lights on the cinema forefront. Then there's the cast. He is casting Paul Meurisse as the gangster and Lino Venture as the cop. True, the latter loves the part. I refuse to sign. I want to switch them to increase credibility. To startle the profession, he casts Tino Rossi as the gangster who has set up the heist. I refuse to see Tino with a

*Colt in his hand. The only one I agree to is Raymond Pellegrin. Simone Signoret won't play Manouche anymore as the part has been cut. Melville is considering a TV announcer, Christine Fabrega...*"

The film was shot at last, in a rocky and risky manner. And Giovanni respected the determination with which Melville fought for the film. *"Melville's quality is that he sacrifices nothing. Young Charlie had launched the shoot in a fit of madness: he could only afford the first week of shooting because the distributor hadn't come through with the advance. To pay for the second week, he borrows money from Louis Malle. To pay for the third week, a young and ambitious production manager saves young Charlie's hide. At the end of the fourth week, there's no lifebelt on the horizon and shooting is stopped. Lino goes to act in another film while Melville edits the footage from the first four weeks. On viewing it, the distributor releases the money. The film, with a new breath of life, starts again. Melville has not lightened the screenplay in any way. People say that a detective movie can only strike the audience through a brief, breath-taking impact of ninety minutes. Melville makes it last one hundred and thirty-five minutes and preserves its impact. My portrait of the underworld has not been betrayed..."*

An unpleasant surprise, an unexpected reminder. When the film was released, reality attempted to silence fiction. *"When Manouche, the former muse of the gangland bosses, turns to the courts to block the film's release, it's like a bolt from the blue. After all, I had only used the lady's nickname. The events in the novel didn't concern her and she was never involved with Gu, the escaped gangster seeking a new life. I have to defend myself... Someone tells me about a lawyer called Robert Badinter, specialized in film litigation. I entrust the case to him. He reads the book, sees Melville's film, studies the personality of the real Manouche who has already recounted her life of crime to a press eager for the thrills such confessions give its young female readers. Badinter wins. Manouche's case is dismissed..."*

Later, when the critics raved about Melville, his imagination, his dialogue and the sheer depth of his characters, all that José Giovanni could do was witness how the film's aura erased everything in its path, including the very trace of his novel. *"However, if there was one thing that I owed Melville, it was the way he respected the novel's construction, the events, the characters and the dialogue, lifted wholesale from my pages."*

The film was released on November 2, 1966, in six Paris theatres, only one of which, the Select Pathé, still stands today under the name of "Le cinéma des cineastes". The film would be a big hit: 1,912,749 admissions in France, with 647,857 in Paris alone.

That same year, José Giovanni crossed the line and became a director too. His first film, "La loi du survivant", was the partial adaptation of his novel "Les aventuriers". From his second film on, he decided to film other writers' stories. His fifth film, in 1971, was the adaptation of an American novel in the "Série noire" collection, "Un aller simple". He went to Antwerp to shoot it. *"I've hired a certain Alain Corneau as first assistant director... His vitality is astounding. We finish shooting at six in the morning and by midday he is already waking the*



crew to talk about the following scenes. Whenever anyone, a stranger at times, approaches me, he steps in. 'Don't disturb the director.' It's obvious that he'll soon be one himself."

José Giovanni would direct ten films in all. In October 1969, the negative of "Le Deuxième souffle" changed hands without him being consulted. "The negative has been acquired for peanuts by a leading light of French cinema, chairman of the Cinémathèque. Bully for him. Business is business. But the rights to my novel 'Le deuxième souffle' had expired. I was hoping that this fellow would call me to extend them. Silence. And then this scrap merchant of cinema sold the film to a TV channel. You buy for next to nothing and then sell rights that you don't own for a high price. All the writer can do is sing for his supper."

Pierre Bromberger, who had obtained the rights to the film along with a number of others on acquiring Charles Lombroso's bankrupt company, "Productions Montaigne", would be forced to reach a compromise in 1987. And José Giovanni recovered his copyright.

Back to 1966: Laurent Pétin, a high school boarder who religiously followed the recommendations of the critic Jean-Louis Bory, read the article that the latter devoted to Melville's film on November 16.

"No need to wait to find out if a film is worth it or not. After the very first shots, the first sounds above all, we know where we stand... This is the case with 'Le deuxième souffle'. From the very first shots blending shadows and fog in the gruelling dawn hours, we know that Jean-Pierre Melville has won. It doesn't matter what tale he is going to tell: the cinema is there."

Laurent Pétin rushed to see the film. This story of honour and trust left a mark on this son of a discreet hero of the Second World War that would stay with him forever.

2001: for more than 10 years, ARP has been producing and distributing films.

Laurent begins dreaming of a new "Deuxième souffle". He asks around and discovers that José Giovanni has recovered the copyright. A few months later, in February 2001, the director of our next production, "La repentie", tells us of her desire to give the silent but intense role of the father of her heroine played by Isabelle Adjani to... José Giovanni. Laetitia Masson has recently seen him on TV talking about "Mon père", his latest feature film. She was struck by his steely blue gaze, his inscrutable face and his dignified bearing. José Giovanni wrote: "I know Isabelle. It's a silent part, made up of looks. Recognizing my daughter or not when she returns after many long years. Emotion. Recognition that refuses to speak its name. I'm doing it..."

Of course, on the day of "his" scene in early June, Laurent visits the set to meet him and to talk about his passion for his "Deuxième souffle". José Giovanni seems won over.

April 17, 2002, sees the release of “La repentie”. At the same time, “Adjani aux pieds nus, le journal de la Repentie” is published. In this book, I relate the story of the film’s production and, at the same time, our work as producers. I appear on a number of TV and radio shows to talk about the book and, in particular, on a late evening show on Europe 1 radio hosted by Daniel Shick. Laurent goes with me. To our surprise, on arriving in the studio, we discover Daniel Shick’s other guest... José Giovanni, there to talk about his memoirs, “Mes grandes gueules”. His wife Zazie is present. We embrace, we sign our books for each other and we talk once more about “Le Deuxième Souffle”. “*Kick-start the engine, I’d really like you to obtain the rights.*” Zazie is a witness to José Giovanni’s generous and friendly words. Words that he will confirm in a letter that he writes to me on May 19, 2002, after reading my film “diary”: “*Tell Laurent to keep me posted about ‘Le deuxième souffle’*”. But, at the time, we are involved in two ambitious productions, Jean-Paul Rappeneau’s “Bon Voyage” and François Dupeyron’s “Monsieur Ibrahim et les fleurs du Coran”. For the next two years, “Le deuxième souffle” takes a back seat. In April 2004, ARP is in the middle of shooting its latest production, “Les mots bleus”, an adaptation of the novel by Dominique Mainard written and directed by Alain Corneau. The shoot, like the subject matter, is intense. On the set, on April 24, we learn of the death of José Giovanni.

January 2005: Alain Corneau, Nadine his wife, Laurent, Jean-Pierre Vincent, the film’s publicist, and myself leave the first screening of “Les mots bleus” held for the press. The screening is followed by the usual debriefing dinner. We talk about the film, then about the cinema and our projects... Alain doesn’t have one for the moment. Laurent asks him, “*Why not go back to cop thrillers? That’s what you prefer, isn’t it?*” Alain Corneau nods, disenchanted. “*These days, cop thrillers are the preserve of TV serials. They’re realistic thrillers, rooted in the everyday world. What I like are the old-style thrillers. The underworld, informers, gangsters... No, apart from remaking ‘Le deuxième souffle’, I cannot think of anything...*”

“*You’re on! I’ve dreamt of that for the last 20 years...*”

We forget the dinner. We dream until the early hours and agree on a basic idea: we need to go back to the novel. The next day, Corneau has to take a long journey by train. He takes a copy of the novel with him. Laurent gets out our copy that José Giovanni gave to us during the shooting of “La repentie” with this generous dedication: “*To two producers who defend the true colours of French cinema based on good stories and sensitive actors.*” Then he added, “*From page 31 to 36, you’ll find Chief Inspector Blot’s famous scene. 90% of the film’s dialogue is in the book and 100% of its action.*”

All his life, Giovanni was saddened that the film caused people to forget his novel. How many times has it been said that Melville asked Michel Audiard to write Blot’s lengthy tirade when it features, word for word, in the book that Giovanni alone wrote? Like Alain

Corneau, we reread the book, we see the film again and we all reach the same conclusion: Melville's film is a masterpiece and a sublime version of the book but the whole book isn't in Melville's film. There are paths that he didn't pursue. The character of Manouche for starters. The book sheds a whole new light on her. This woman is deeply in love with Gu but she will never consider living without the protection of a man. Gu shares her love but he nonetheless dooms it because, for him, his moral standards are more important than anything else, even if that includes the love of a woman and the sweetness of a life together. The book also sheds some light on the complex personality of Blot, an upstanding and brilliant character whose flaw is revealed in the novel - the death of his only child - making him a broken and therefore invulnerable man. Alain decides to tackle the adaptation alone. *"At least for the first draft, then I'll probably need to bring someone else in."* Alain, timid and so anxious that he cannot even consider what we already know: he has dreamt of this film for so long that he won't need anyone else's help to write the screenplay. But we prefer to allow him to deal with his doubts without saying so. One last question that we raise once and for all in order to settle it for good: should we leave the story in its period, the early 1960s, or should we try to transpose it and set it in modern times? A change of period is clearly unrealistic. This behaviour, these moral codes no longer hold sway today while they still existed in Melville's time. Therefore, transposing the story to the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century would inevitably ring false. So this tragedy needs to be left in its original context. But on one condition: filming the period through today's eyes. With the most sophisticated means available: using surprising and saturated colours, filming in long single takes with the fluidity provided by the steadicam, resort to 3D and state-of-the-art HD cameras, for instance to film the night scenes, with the "Genesis" used by Michael Mann in "Collateral". There was no question of telling this story in black and white, nor in the bluish black that has been so fashionable these last ten years to give a film a "detective story" look. Since an almost perfect, totally pared down version of the film already exists, we need to reinvent "Le deuxième souffle" to make this timeless tragedy a modern movie. The examples of "Gladiator" and "A Very Long Engagement" come to mind. Ridley Scott didn't show Ancient Rome in the way that it was depicted in "Ben Hur". Jean-Pierre Jeunet didn't film the trenches in the same way as Stanley Kubrick did in "Paths of Glory". Therefore, it is up to us to find a new way of observing the codes and behaviour of the early 1960s. To modernize them and, as a result, strengthen the myth. It is up to us to invent, in total freedom yet respecting this "good story" to the letter, this last-ditch struggle between morality and compromise, between trust and betrayal, between a king and crooks...

Michèle Pétin ~ Producer

## **ALAIN CORNEAU**

**Screenwriter, director**

Originally a jazz musician and a film buff, Alain Corneau left for New York after studying film at the IDHEC in Paris.

On returning to France, he worked as an assistant director and, in 1973, shot his first film, "France, Société Anonyme", a blend of police thriller and science fiction, starring Michel Bouquet.

In 1976, he picked Yves Montand and Simone Signoret to star in "Police Python 367", and in 1977 shot "La Menace", again with Yves Montand.

In 1979, he made "Série Noire", with Patrick Dewaere and Marie Trintignant, then in 1981 "Le Choix des Armes" with Yves Montand, Catherine Deneuve and Gérard Depardieu.

He subsequently made "Fort Saganne" and "Le Môme".

In 1988, he changed styles and made "Afghanistan" in Pakistan with Michel Blanc (for TV), then went to India to film "Nocturne Indien" with Jean-Hugues Anglade.

In 1991, he made a period film on baroque music, "Tous les Matins du Monde", that starred Jean-Pierre Marielle and Gérard Depardieu.

In 1994, he evoked his relationship with jazz and America in "Le Nouveau Monde", then returned to the police thriller, in a realistic vein this time, with "Le Cousin", starring Alain Chabat and Patrick Timsit. This was followed by an adventure comedy in 2000, "Le Prince du Pacifique", starring Thierry Lhermitte and Patrick Timsit. In 2002, he adapted Amélie Nothomb's novel on company culture in Japan, "Stupeur et Tremblements". The film starred Sylvie Testud whom he worked with again in 2004 on "Les mots Bleus", adapted from the novel by Dominique Mainard.

## INTERVIEW

## ALAIN CORNEAU

### **When did you first meet José Giovanni?**

**Alain Corneau:** I was an assistant director at the time. And he was putting a crew together. I knew who he was: I had read his books because I was a big fan of detective thrillers. He was a friendly guy, with a very sharp gaze and a moonlike face. He knew what he wanted. He either adopted you or he didn't. He was straightforward and modest about his work. He wanted to renew his crew, find younger people and he gave me the freedom to put together a fair part of the crew. He was an excellent teller of true stories. He had retained that from his time in jail and he would tell us tales every evening after day's shooting. I met his wife, Zazie. Our friendship was born in the course of production. There were a few scenes, night scenes, or scenes in cars, when he would say to me, "I'm not sure about setting this up. What do you think?" And that was a wonderful gift for me. We didn't make any other films together, I became a director myself, but we saw each other regularly, for the pleasure of it.

### **And "Second Wind" quickly became a subject of conversation?**

**Alain Corneau:** Not right away, we didn't tackle the subject until a few years later. To start with, we often talked about Melville's film, which fascinated me. He refused to admit that it was a great film, because of all the problems that he had had with Melville. He accused the film of lacking scope, of being devoid of feelings, of not getting across the friendship between the characters. It's true, when you knew José and you saw Becker's "Le trou" or Sautet's "Classe tous risques", you could tell that those films are much closer to José. After making "Police Python" and "La menace", I was looking for ideas based on a strong subject, like that of "Second Wind". I never once considered remaking it because, for me, it was a world of the past, with moral positions that had taken on an academic air. At the time, no one wanted to film gangsters in Pigalle anymore. We wanted to go out to the suburbs. We wanted to talk about the social, literary, political and aesthetic tidal wave fuelled by drugs. The underworld was in a mess. The gangsters had no morals anymore. With "Le choix des armes", I had the idea of a sort of bridge between these two generations. Montand played an old-time gangster and Depardieu the new generation. Initially, the film was called "Abel le Caïd et Mickey le dingue" (*Abel the Boss and Crazy Mickey*).

### **What did Giovanni think of these “new-wave thrillers”?**

**Alain Corneau:** Since José belonged to an earlier generation, he asked both himself and us a great deal of questions. Where are the great tragic feelings? How can all the characters be made sublime? Magnifying the characters is an idea that marked me. I started to discover the people who had made those kinds of films. Such as Gilles Grangier. Some of his films were excellent! He cried when we told him that we loved his films. They really spoke to us. What we liked in them was the return to the apparent realism of the 1950s and 1960s, his fondness of every trade, and the figure of Gabin wandering through all that. He had a modest and lively approach to the codes. We really and seriously started talking about remaking “Second Wind” between 1970 and 1975 with José who was fairly keen on the idea. We would talk about it twice a year, each time we saw each other. One day, I said to him, “All right, this time, I’m going to try.” I thought about it, in an incoherent manner. Should the plot be updated? I tried it and the whole thing fell apart. But if I were to make a period film, I was running the risk of it being too decorative. Should the action be shifted to another country? I met with American producers but I soon realized that this story was rooted in France.

### **And then you stopped making thrillers...**

**Alain Corneau:** The genre gradually went into decline. Television has buried us in an avalanche of police serials with characters designed to attract the maximum number of viewers, so devoid of doubt, cut and pasted into stories without any social background, without tragedy, without ethics or morals. When the left was voted into office, that didn’t help things either. Because it meant that we lost the political angle that motivated us. And the writers started producing militant novels with political overtones, to the detriment of the story’s construction and its characters and with a totally inadaptable form of tongue-in-cheek humour. *Film noir* stopped being a collective genre. Genre cinema needs a large number of films to evolve. In France, all of a sudden, we stopped making it. In the 1990s, we told the thriller stories from the cops’ angle, with characters caught up in an everyday, naturalistic and documentary-like vision without any glorifying marginality...

## **That was when you made “Le cousin”...**

**Alain Corneau:** Yes, because I had met a former cop, Michel Alexandre, who wrote the screenplay with me, who had told me about the real life of cops and their relationship with their informers whom they called “cousins”, in other words members of the family whom they pampered. The cop became a crook at times and the dealer occasionally acted like a cop. I felt that it was interesting to show that. But the film shocked José. “It’s an amoral film, you’re out of your mind! What the hell is this, a cop thriller where the characters have no destiny? They’re not heroes, they’re scum!” Having directed “Série noire” many years earlier, I couldn’t agree with him entirely, but his arguments touched a point deep within me.

Over the years, “Second Wind” became clearer in my mind. What was lacking was the detonator, the catalyst. I found it when I met producers who had the same dream as me without me knowing it, who knew José and who had discussed the idea with him... I remember that dinner when Laurent and Michèle said that it was high time I returned to cop thrillers and I told them everything that I just told you: the decline of the genre, the lack of moral postures and mythical figures. And I wound up saying, “Apart from remaking ‘Second Wind’, I cannot think of anything.” At that point, Laurent held his hand out to me. “You’re on! I’ve dreamt of that for the last 20 years...” The very next morning, I got to work.

## **By rereading the book?**

**Alain Corneau:** Of course. Because, in talking about it over dinner, all the conversations that I had had with José on the subject came back to me: keeping the story in its period, picking Auteuil to play Gu, showing the love between Gu and Manouche at last after it had been pushed aside in Melville’s film, along with Blot’s weal point... In other words, it was necessary to return to the book to tackle it from a new angle. On rereading the book, more than two years ago now, I rediscovered the extreme richness of the characters and its construction. I have to say that the book is surprising. It opens with an escape, a guy dies, we move to Manouche’s, a gunman dies and the death of this gunman determines what follows: the mechanism of tragedy is already under way.

José was obsessed by informers. And Gu, a man with a strict moral code, is tricked into giving a name and information. Giovanni slipped the poison into the purest of all his characters. It’s hard to get over that. He places Gu in an inhuman situation that leads him to the final

shoot-out. And we are with him, we identify with him. Is Gu a good guy or a bad guy? The question has no relevance because we are dealing with tragedy here. You need great characters to attain that.

### **Why do you think that Gu renounces killing Jo Ricci before leaving Paris?**

**Alain Corneau:** Ah, that famous line, “Drive, I’m not going,” that Gu says to Alban... I realize what is going through his mind but, at the same time, I still don’t understand. Has he sensed the cops, as Zazie believes, or is he scared? I don’t know, so I’ve allowed Blot to express both options: instinct or fear. That’s symbolic of Gu: we never know if he’s going to make it or not, if he’s going or not, if he’s found his second wind or not. The prison escape and the scene on the train are constructed in this way: will he make it or not? In front of Jo’s club, he hesitates. But after the heist, he becomes the same Gu as before...

### **And why does he always use the same Colt?**

**Alain Corneau:** That is something that José places in the novel but that he never explains. Did ballistic testing already exist to such an extent when the book was written? José says that Gu is a lost man and he leaves it at that. I take the option of saying that it’s intentional. The lost man knows what he’s doing.

### **José Giovanni wanted Daniel Auteuil to play Gu...**

**Alain Corneau:** José and I had talked about Auteuil. Melville, at one point, wanted to switch his cast around and have Paul Meurisse play Gu, something that made José mad with rage... Lino Ventura and José were close friends but José always thought that Lino was too powerful to play this hero at the end of the line. And he told me that Daniel Auteuil was closer to the man he describes in the book: “Someone pointed him out to me, I was disappointed: he looked like a bank clerk.” Daniel Auteuil has the stature required for the part. With age and experience, he has become more mysterious. He has gained in power and charisma but he still has a very childlike gaze.



## How did you pick your cast?

**Alain Corneau:** Once the screenplay was finished, my producers and I felt that we needed actors of a certain calibre, top-notch performers, in order to make this film work. So we drew up a list and decided that it would be the decision-maker. If three out of five actors turned us down, we would cancel the whole project. We need a deep-seated and intense harmony between the actors and their parts. From this point of view, actors are good readers. The period, the codes of the period and the underworld, either that struck a chord with them or it didn't. And all five of them really wanted to read the screenplay fast and they quickly agreed to be in the film. We first sent the screenplay to Daniel who was very enthusiastic and gave me the gift of one of those phone calls you love to have, the actor who wakes you at seven in the morning saying, "I can't wait any longer to tell you I love it..." When that happens, the job is almost done. When actors react like that - and all five of them reacted that way - it means they already have a handle on the part. It's a gut feeling. It's a good sign.

## On the set, you would set up before sending for the actors...

**Alain Corneau:** This was the first time in my career that I've done things that way and I still don't know why. But it provided a genuine form of comfort for the actors and reassured them. Their presence simply improved the set-up. Therefore, we did very few rehearsals and very few takes. In any case, in a genre film, you know right away if the take is a good one. You have to be modest in relation to the genre, otherwise you fall into the trap of aestheticism. And you also have to remember that the genre comes after the story, which in this case is incredibly solid. And since I had the best cast possible, things were quickly self-evident. We did one take to warm up and the second take was often the good one. We did three or four takes if something went wrong, if there was a technical glitch or a word that wasn't clear... Clint Eastwood is a big fan of the first take. Personally, I'd say that it depends on the film. Sometimes, the direction needs to be a little more hesitant. But, on this set, doing no end of takes would have exhausted the actors needlessly. In any case, as soon as we set up, we could tell right away if the camera wasn't in the right place. It was an intense shoot but not a tiring one. I didn't sense the slump that you feel in the third week of shooting, I wasn't tired during the final weeks. We were into it completely, we sensed that we had something, we were totally focused and the actors were firing on all cylinders.

### **Each frame is interesting but without ever being “showy”...**

**Alain Corneau:** Because each frame serves the action. I've tried to make sure that the framing is both apt and unexpected. I haven't tried to decorate the story but to tell it as well as possible. The film relates a tragedy, so there was a form of liturgy that had to be found. I had two guidelines. The first: avoid naturalism, leave the real world behind and create a form of reality that belongs only to the film. The second: never become solemn or theatrical. It's an exciting blend that leads to lyricism and you can sense it straightaway on the set. We needed to create the film's period and its world. We're in the first years of the 1960s, we wanted to avoid the typical colours of the genre, in other words black and white or cold steel blue. During preparation, I would tell the crew: “Forget good taste, avoid the different shades of grey and beige!”

### **There are a number of action scenes shot in slow motion...**

**Alain Corneau:** I thought, while writing, that only Gu's death would be in slow motion. During preparation, we developed that. I fed the crew on Asian cinema. It taught us to choreography death and violence. Gu's death was filmed at 120 frames per second, which is a lot. Slow motion is something organic and instinctive. The result may seem mannered. But it has become a visual narrative mode like any other... You're aware of my great admiration for Sam Peckinpah... He took the editing of slow motion shots to an incredible level of excellence. He was a true virtuoso of those modern mosaics.

### **For this film, you have worked with a number of actors for the first time...**

**Alain Corneau:** I needed a cast worthy of the film. Personally, I had a long history of lost opportunities with Daniel. But we were right to wait... Daniel is so motivated, precise and focused that working with him is a constant gift. With this film, he has reached a turning point. He says that, after Ugolin, Gu marks a new stage in his career. Even if each film matters, an actor can tell when he crosses a line. On this film, I've worked once again with Michel Blanc who, over the years, has matured incredibly. Like Daniel Auteuil, Michel is a great comic actor who plays out the situation completely. He makes people laugh because he is desperate. So that makes him a great tragic actor too. He is incredible.

My relationship with Jacques Dutronc is like a love affair. We immediately got along on meeting for the first time in Corsica. We were in the garden. I put the screenplay down in front of him and I said, "You don't need to read it, the wind's turning the pages for you." On top of that, there's the fact that he owned a Bentley when he was younger... Jacques is a real dandy. He always strives to look as if he is doing nothing but he works hard, he is really focused, he knows his lines by heart and he handles them like a musician, with finesse, precision and emotion... He makes a magnificent Orloff.

It would have been complicated if we hadn't had Monica. It was her idea to dye her hair blond and she was right since it was perfect both for the period and the character. I was delighted that she had such an idea because it showed me that she was already fully implicated in the film and the part. Monica has the very rare capacity to express feelings in total liberty. She knows how to reveal a lack or an excess of emotion in a flash. She brings elegance and simplicity to the character, she is luminous and more than beautiful. Her blond hair makes her even more carnal, curvaceous and mythical. Blondness refers us back to a number of codes, just like the cigarettes and the close-fitting dresses...

### **How did you think of Eric Cantona?**

**Alain Corneau:** Alban was the hardest one to find... Alban is the product of his Corsican village. He is a child, as silent as the grave, sincerely and utterly devoted. An actor can't play him by trying to get under his skin. It's hard to get that in one piece. One morning, I thought of Eric and he immediately appeared to be the obvious choice. After reading the screenplay, he reacted with a line that Alban could have uttered, "I think I'd like to defend this character." Eric is straight out of the pages of the book. Alban is him. Eric belongs to José's world. They would have sensed each other as brothers. He is a fine actor with the modesty and doubts of a great actor.

Gilbert Melki was hesitant about taking the part because he felt that he didn't have any scenes to defend. I talked him into it and I'm glad I did because the more of a bastard he is, the funnier he is. Between Gu and Jo, it became obvious to me during editing that Gu focuses his rage on Jo, as if he symbolized everything that is wrong with the world. It's all Jo's fault... It was Melki's performance that created that.

Nicolas Duvauchelle is the one in which Gu recognizes himself. Nicolas plays the type of character that I have circled around in my previous films. He's the modern guy, he is to Auteuil what Depardieu was to Montand. "The motorcycle cops are ours and no one else's." They are friends in absolute evil. There is a very strong bond between them that will be reversed at the end. The son will try to

kill the father. In siding with Jo, Antoine becomes Gu's direct enemy. I heightened this in relation to the book. Gu knows that in killing Antoine, he will be killing himself, this crime will mean the end of him. He kills his son and, with him, his last chance.

**This is also the first time that you have worked with Bruno Coulais...**

**Alain Corneau:** I really wanted to meet him, notably because of "Les Rivières pourpres", his symphonic talents and his Corsican polyphonies. We discovered that we have a mutual love of Howard Shore... I **knew** that this film required a single composer in charge of the whole film. He quickly perceived the film's style. With his first layout, everything was there: a world suspended, purely tragic and dramatic, music that is never in sync with the image in the direct sense, that would give the images the fresh air that they need. I could have done the whole cut with his layouts. Even if he excels at light-hearted scores like "Les choristes", there is a tragic world within him, without any despair but always with a hint of humanity.

**What do you think of the film?**

**Alain Corneau:** I'm incapable of being a mere spectator of a film that I have made... During editing, I had some pleasant surprises concerning the highly formalized intentions I had during shooting, I saw in cutting the scenes together that they work and, above all, I had to admire the narrative continuity in the actors' performances. Daniel pulls off tough scenes in which he is more and more himself or less and less...

I would be very happy if this film led people to recognize José's talent at last. The themes that people consider as being Melville's are given their incandescence by José. If you take "Le trou", "Classe tous risques" or "Le deuxième souffle", directed by three very different directors, the world is the same: it comes from the books.

**The title, "Second Wind", takes on its full meaning when one knows about the life of José Giovanni...**

**Alain Corneau:** Yes, because José had two lives, prison and then redemption. And that redemption was able to come about because of his past. That past became **an inspiration** for him... And for us now.

## INTERVIEW

## DANIEL AUTEUIL

**Alain Corneau says that you woke him at seven in the morning to tell him how enthusiastic you were about the screenplay...**

**Daniel Auteuil:** On reading it, I told myself that this part, this screenplay and this adventure were a gift. It's a magnificent story, a great and timeless tragedy, a mythical part as much for the actor as for the audience: everyone wants to play or be Gu...

**What makes this part so mythical?**

**Daniel Auteuil:** The fact that Gu, when he escapes after a fair number of years in prison, is so out of touch with his times. He is out of step on a moral level. He still believes, as a gangster, in the notion of trust and a certain hierarchy. But I'm not saying that trust is an issue confined to those times. Trust is indispensable whatever the period and the profession. Each one of us can choose between being a man and being a worm... But Gu is out of touch. When he escapes, he discovers that his world has changed, that not everybody follows the same rules. Fortunately, friendship, another fundamental value is still there. Gu still has friends.

**José Giovanni liked to quote these words that gangsters were fond of: "If you have two friends, that's two more than anyone else..."**

**Daniel Auteuil:** Indeed, as long as these guys hold a rank and are feared, they are surrounded by people, they have lots of friends. On escaping from prison, Gu is lucky enough to find a network of friends who still wield some power.

### **How does an actor prepare for a role like that of Gu?**

**Daniel Auteuil:** Since the screenplay is so close to the spirit of Giovanni's book, I read the book a great deal to avoid reading the screenplay over and over. I immersed myself in his characters, their times, in Giovanni's dialogue and descriptions. That was before shooting. Because when I'm acting, I can't really say. When we shoot, I'm tuned in to others, I immerse myself in everything that's happening: the interaction with the other actors, the relationship with the director but also with sets, the lighting and the scene's atmosphere. I'm in a sort of floating world, I sense that everything is in place, I don't try to analyse or think too much, I'm just caught up in the action, especially for this part. Everything around us is so powerful that we are caught up in the euphoria, excitement, pleasure and jubilation of acting. I feel things that I felt as a five-year-old child... That's useful when you're playing Gu who has something childlike about him with his highly contrasted and childish view of life, something you often find in gangsters like him. They are focused on objects, revolvers, cars, the look and the props. And then there's the intense surge of adrenalin that you feel when you're about to do a job, which is a way of refusing reality and everyday life.

### **What kind of relationship do you think Gu and Orloff have?**

**Daniel Auteuil:** They share a certain way of doing things. Each one of them is a lord in his field and they both know it. There is a form of mutual admiration between them. Moreover, they share the same tastes... There is admiration between Gu and Blot too. Of course, Blot never dreams for one second of being Gu but they often admire each other's deeds, as can be the case between the prey and the hunter. Each one surprises the other.

**One thing differentiates them: Blot talks a great deal and almost seems to be listening to himself talk, while Gu is very sparing with his words...**

**Daniel Auteuil:** Blot speaks in tirades and monologues while Gu chooses his words with a great deal of precision. Each word from him is like a blast of nitro-glycerine. Gu is an intense and very rigid man. He has a certain weight and uses words with a great deal of parsimony and meticulousness, displaying vocabulary typical of his world. There are powerful images in his words. It's a real pleasure for

an actor to be able to use these prehistoric stones carved out of that language. They are the work of a true craftsman. You just have to speak those words. They are so right...

### **Gu says very little, yet he finds himself trapped and starts talking...**

**Daniel Auteuil:** Maybe the others are right, maybe he's too old. I think that he would have sensed the trap twenty years earlier. On the level of action and instinct, he has aged. But he reacts all the same. His second wind is his rebirth: after the heist, he has a spring in his step again, he feels he looks good. And people are helping him: he's lucky. His two friends are the right friends to have. Manouche represents both his lucky break and his defeat. Without her, he might not have bothered to take part in the heist. He does it so that he won't have to share her money and that's normal: he acts according to his dignity and honour as a man. This film is the story of a man who follows his destiny. It's inescapable. As a viewer, destinies like these make me sick and petrify me. It's terrible to watch and identify with someone that nothing can stop or turn from his path, not even the love of an exceptional woman. Gu summons his survival instinct just to save his honour, not his life. It's magnificent and that's what makes him so touching.

### **Why do you think he uses the same gun all the time?**

**Daniel Auteuil:** I think he knows before everyone else that he has had it, so he doesn't try to hide when he kills others. I say kill, I don't say murder or slaughter, I can't. For me, Gu is like a knight. He is getting his revenge. Besides, he has sworn that he will never return to jail so he has nothing to lose.

### **You are working under Alain Corneau's direction at last...**

**Daniel Auteuil:** We had been trying to work together for 16 years, since 1990. The fourth attempt is the right one and, seeing what we are doing together, I feel we were right to wait... Alain has a quality that very few directors still have: a desire to tackle his subject, the shoot and the whole adventure with extreme rigour on every level and at every stage, be it writing, casting or preparation. But he does it all with the jubilation of a child. And the shoot is very pleasant because of his delight and his very open relationship with others. This

shoot is slipping away between our fingers like a long vacation. That is quite frankly exceptional. It has a lot to do with him. When I start a film, I don't want to know anything in advance, I don't want to see the sets, for instance. To avoid any form of boredom, I don't look ahead. I'm able to live totally in the present moment and to make the most of it because that moment necessarily passes in next to no time. I love watching others and, as a result, I'm surprised by the regularity of the energy, pleasure and excellent human relations on this shoot. Very surprised indeed. And that nourishes us each day too. We draw strength from each other.

**Let's say a few words about the other actors. You have worked with Monica Bellucci before. What characterizes her, and I'm not referring to her physique...**

**Daniel Auteuil:** But her physique matters too... Monica is an exceptional partner for an actor because she immediately gives what the other person expects from her. You're never disappointed by her. She is very generous in her performance, she shows emotions. Moreover, on a human level, I'm very fond of her.

I've never worked with Jacques Dutronc before. He is amazing as this slightly off-key, solitary gangster who follows his own rules. Unlike Gu, he has a very sharp instinct for self-preservation... I also like the relationship between Orloff and Manouche. She has a survival instinct a thousand times more developed than anyone else's. We can tell that she will never be poor or alone again. She cannot live otherwise. She starts off as a widow, then she's with Gu before ending up with Orloff, with the blessing of Gu whom she truly loves. She and Gu have a very powerful and beautiful love affair. And Orloff is fascinated by her. I think this is perhaps the first time that he has fallen in love. While Blot, who keeps all sense of proportion, has a very lucid crush on Manouche. Dutronc plays an upstanding and lone man who acts as a sort of referee while Michel Blanc plays a much more opaque character who casts a very sharp and piercing gaze on the characters around him. What an excellent cast...

**Among the scenes that you have already shot, which ones marked you the most?**

**Daniel Auteuil:** Quite frankly, I've forgotten everything that we've done so far. I live for the present moment, I devour action and emotion. There isn't a single scene that isn't a joy to shoot because of the way the film is constructed. Just think about it: there are no establishing scenes, we're on the line every day. It's a child-like pleasure. Each day, when I perform, I feel like I'm 10 years old again! I find



myself in the same state as when I was little, when I used to shoot with my fingers and make the sound of the gunshot. But when you were the one who got killed, that hurt too... Acting is bound up with childhood. Men are multiple personalities, we're ten thousand things at once: good, evil, bastards, heroes... This job helps me to come to terms with that. It saves me from going crazy because of it...

**Aren't you tempted by directing?**

**Daniel Auteuil:** I have no desire at all to direct a film. First of all, I'm lucky enough to work with important directors who ask for me and so I sense no frustration and feel creative in my work as an actor. If I was behind the camera, I wouldn't know where to put it. However, when I'm in front of it, I can tell right away if it isn't in the right spot. I know where my place is.

## INTERVIEW

## MONICA BELLUCCI

**You accepted the part immediately after reading the screenplay...**

**Monica Bellucci:** Of course! To start with, the screenplay really impressed me. And, on top of that, I really wanted to work with Alain Corneau, I dreamt of being on a set with him and I was right to dream: each day spent with him is a lesson in cinema. For an Italian, appearing in a French film this ambitious is an incredible opportunity. And Manouche is an incredible woman.

**Describe Manouche to us the way you see her...**

**Monica Bellucci:** Manouche represents a time when women had a very different way of being. She comes from the street but she has built up her personality. She wanted to belong to another social class. She has become rich, she looks bourgeois, but her true nature is that of a gypsy. That's Manouche: an elegant surface that hides an untamed nature. This dual personality is very interesting to present. Manouche was born among gangsters. Their world is the only one she knows. She met the first man in her life, Paul, at the age of 16. and he called her Manouche because she loves to dance and wear bright colours. The reality of the gangsters' world, with its cruelty and violence, is something that she knows by heart: she respects its rules and principles.

**Behind her smooth and secure image, we can tell that she is pulling the strings...**

**Monica Bellucci:** That makes her a true heroine of *film noir*, in other words a woman whose presence unsettles a world of men. We think that the men establish the rules but behind each man there's a woman and behind Gu there's Manouche. She knows that this man is heading towards a tragic destiny that not even she can save him from. She tries to struggle against it because, as a woman, she embodies the light. But fate is already at work around her. She struggles to save Gu, even though she knows he is destined to die. And, in trying to escape this tragedy, she too will find her second wind perhaps.

### **You wanted Manouche to be blond...**

**Monica Bellucci:** Finding the right physique for a part is a great help in building up a character. After reading the screenplay, I thought of all the French actresses from this period, the end of the 50s and the early 60s, who inspired me: Brigitte Bardot, Catherine Deneuve. It was a time when women had very shapely bodies and blond hair. And, all of a sudden, it seemed obvious: Manouche is blond. At the time, blond hair was the image of femininity. Blond hair with slightly darker roots because it's not her natural colour. She has dyed her hair and this is part of the image that she has built up to save herself, to be something other than a girl from the streets. The blond and elegant woman that she has become is an image that protects her and gives her a bourgeois air, in spite of her origins.

### **Was it hard to persuade Alain Corneau?**

**Monica Bellucci:** Not at all. He trusted me, we did tests. This blond Manouche, perched on her high heels, with her neat make-up, her tight-fitting dresses, was there from the start... Actually, it's rare to see a director take such a close interest in the way you physically build up your character. He followed Manouche's physical construction closely, he was always present when we were preparing the character: her hair, make-up, costumes. He pays close attention to everything anyway...

### **Manouche is also a woman in love...**

**Monica Bellucci:** In the violent world that she lives in, she knows how to lie if necessary but, above all, she knows how to love and she is ready to sacrifice herself for her love. She can show real violence, she can smooth-talk others but she is very honest in relation to the feelings that Gu inspires in her. I think, deep down, she has always known that she loves him. When she hears that he has escaped, we can tell that she is devastated. In the book, it says that she was attracted to him when they first met but, at the time, she was with Paul and stayed faithful to him. Even if Gu isn't what you can call a handsome man, she is drawn to his moral strength. She senses that he could protect her. The physical attraction between them is very strong because Manouche is sensuous and carnal. Therefore, she is attracted physically and morally. It's a beautiful affair between two lucid adults. Both of them have had eventful lives. She has seen a lot of people die around her. She has learnt to defend herself. But she can only exist if she has a man at her side because she needs protection

in this world. When she realizes that she is moving towards death with Gu, when she realize that she cannot do anything for him anymore, her animal instinct pushes her towards Orloff. It's the law of the jungle. Manouche has very sure instincts and a deep attachment to life. She wants to try to live as long as possible. Orloff will be her second wind, her last chance.

### **You have excellent partners in the film...**

**Monica Bellucci:** I realize how lucky I am to be performing with the cream of French cinema. These actors were light years away from me not that long ago. Acting with them makes your work very easy because they are constant source of inspiration when they perform opposite you, their acting is simple and natural, it doesn't paralyze me but, on the contrary, it inspires me. It makes me want to surpass myself. Moreover, in real life, these men have incredible charm. They have the approach, the masculinity and also the fragility of great actors. When they perform, you would think that nothing has been written, that they are inventing the words themselves. As a result, the words are no longer a burden. We're acting but we believe so strongly in what is happening between us that it doesn't feel like acting anymore.

### **The atmosphere on the set isn't at all tense...**

**Monica Bellucci:** It's a set where everyone is very focused. And we feel pampered because Alain Corneau protects his actors. His love of the cinema is expressed on a day-to-day level by his respect for us: he cares for us and protects us. We feel loved and respected, it's real pleasure. All of us, actors and crew, are totally focused, no time is wasted. We're all relaxed because we all have our place, know it and stick to it. Alain Corneau shoots very few takes or, more exactly, he shoots all the takes he needs until he has the right one. Once he has it, he knows it, says so and moves on to the next shot. We can sense how experienced he is. In these conditions, it's hard to go wrong but if we do, he's there, he sees everything and it makes me feel more confident knowing that if I trip up he will be there to catch me.

**What do you think of the film's aesthetic approach?**

**Monica Bellucci:** Making a film that is both modern and timeless, overturning the codes of the genre to give them a mythical aspect, bringing the Asian influence into French *film noir*... All that delights me. I think it's very intelligent. With Bertrand Blier, I played a sublimated woman whereas here I'm the very opposite. Manouche is a very real woman.

**And how do you feel as a blond?**

**Monica Bellucci:** Right now, I AM blond. On the first day, I was scared, I wanted everyone on the set to believe it. So we had to create this blondness, find the light and complexion that went with the blond hair. Now, when I go dark again, it will be a big shock for me...

## INTERVIEW

## MICHEL BLANC

### **Chief Inspector Blot is a very unusual cop...**

**Michel Blanc:** He is a man who hides a deep wound behind his slightly theatrical airs and his cold humour. He speaks beautifully. He is verbose but never condescending. You can see that, for instance, in the way he shows his young assistant the ropes: he teases him playfully but never shows any contempt for him...

### **He doesn't show contempt for crooks either...**

**Michel Blanc:** No, he knows them too well... He has a sort of intimacy with crooks, theirs is a world he knows perfectly, and he knows how to play with them, like a cat with mice. For instance, in the scene where he goes to see Jo Ricci in his bar, he is very devious with him. Or also in the scene at Manouche's place when he explains to his colleagues that there is no sense in questioning the people present since none of them saw anything. It's his way of telling these crooks: all right, don't think we're stupid, we know what's going on, so we're not even going to ask you any questions, you can't fool me and, in passing, I'll make a little fun of you... But to get back to the question, the only character that Blot despises is Fardiano, because he is a crooked cop who uses underhand methods that tarnish Blot's honour.

### **Can we say that Blot feels respect for Gu?**

**Michel Blanc:** Yes, and this respect is mutual. For instance at the end, Gu waits until Blot is out of his field of action before he opens fire. And Blot tries to convince Gu not to take this suicidal last stand. Blot is there to prevent the crooks from doing harm, he is even capable of using fairly devious methods, but he respects Gu, even when he traps him. He is his opponent, he is out to get him, but without humiliating him. Blot will pass Gu's notebook on to re-establish his honour, making him Gu's legal executor in a way: he carries out his final wish. He respects everything that's good about Gu.

**Blot also appreciates Manouche...**

**Michel Blanc:** He is touched by her. And, at the end of the film, he opts to save her future. He lies to her to help her move on to another life...

**In Patrice Leconte’s “Monsieur Hire”, you played the part taken by Michel Simon in Duvivier’s film. Here, you reprise a role played by Paul Meurisse...**

**Michel Blanc:** ...And, in both cases, I decided not to think about it. Each director has a new approach so you have to follow the screenplay. And since Alain Corneau has decided to return to the source of the story, José Giovanni’s novel, I have the opportunity to show Blot’s inner wound, this flaw within him that he reveals in the course of a scene. That changes everything. This man seems at ease and self-assured but, deep down, something has snapped with him. His brilliance is simply a veneer, we have to sense that he could break down any minute. Therefore, “my” Blot is craftier and less of a monolith. He is in his fifties, like me, and so, like me, he wears spectacles that date from the period. They lie lower over the eyelids and, as with the suit, that helps you to acquire a different posture. Here, I wear a hat nearly all the time and never remove it in front of the crooks. All this plunges you into a form of discomfort that can help your performance. For instance, the stiff collar of the shirt means that you stand up straighter, contributing to the character’s slightly arrogant attitude.

**You had already worked with Alain Corneau on a TV-movie in Pakistan...**

**Michel Blanc:** That was an incredible adventure, very risky at times because we shot it on the Afghan border. It was “dicey” and we both have very powerful memories of that journey.

I really wanted to work with him again because he really knows what he wants. Directors aren’t all like that... Moreover, he is an incredibly cultured man, he knows as much about music as he does about the cinema. He is a subtle and demanding person, always seeking out the truth of the character and the situation. You feel carried along by him. He has a way of saying very little that speaks volumes... We talked about the character before shooting. He wanted the audience to sense the character’s inner wound and built Blot

up with that in mind. He corrects things that aren't quite right without any useless talk or excessive analysis. He is not the kind of director who tells you that the character fell off a red ladder when he was three years old or something like that.

### **How did you go about learning Blot's long speeches?**

**Michel Blanc:** There's only one way to deal with speeches like these: learn them in plenty of time! For a shoot in November, I started learning my lines in August. Blot never stops talking. So, in order to bring in subtlety and nuance, you need to have perfect control of your lines. You have to avoid becoming mechanical in your delivery in order to let things happen and to allow the lines time to get under your skin. This kind of work is what makes this job fascinating, it's more enriching to know your lines, to have absorbed them, to have made them part of yourself than to learn your dialogue during make-up. The actor's trade is a genuine craft.

### **Like Daniel Auteuil, whom you directed in "Mauvaise passe", you were first recognized for your comic talent...**

**Michel Blanc:** Yes, but Daniel has a seductive side that allowed him to shift more rapidly from comedy to more dramatic parts. With "Monsieur Hire", I moved from comic characters to crazy ones and then, slowly, I started to play normal people. With the years, you change as well. I feel more comfortable, I've gained depth and maturity. A few years ago, I would have stressed Blot's unbalanced and fragile side, I would probably have made him too neurotic. This year, I have played all kinds of parts. I'm lucky enough not to be pigeonholed anymore.

To get back to Daniel Auteuil, we only have two scenes together, including one in which he is riddled with bullets... There's a genuine violence in him, we believe entirely in the killer that he plays. We can tell that Gu is dangerous, even though Daniel is nothing like that in real life. In this part, he is able to find floods of power and violence within him and displays terrifying rage.



**You had never worked with Monica Bellucci or Eric Cantona before...**

**Michel Blanc:** The first scene that Monica and I shot together was the one in my office. It's an interesting scene. Blot speaks to her with a great deal of sincerity. And Monica gave me a lot in that scene, a genuine and extremely precise gaze. She gives off an intense and sincere form of generosity when she acts. There is something radiant about her that helps you in your performance.

As for Cantona, he has phenomenal stature. He is a magnificent actor with an incredible gaze... It's unbelievable what you receive when you perform with him. And he's a great guy in real life, attentive, warm-hearted and almost timid... Our scene together in the car is one of Alain Corneau's brilliant ideas. We couldn't walk side by side: he is so tall, even heels wouldn't have worked for me. I would have needed a table! And so, instead, we have a surprising scene in which I interrogate him without letting him read my face since he is sitting behind me. A fine example of the art of directing...

## INTERVIEW

## JACQUES DUTRONC

**Orloff seems to know everything about everybody, yet reveals nothing about himself...**

**Jacques Dutronc:** Age has taught him things. He probably has a troubled past but he displays a certain elegance in his crimes and has had a better education than the others. He is a very loyal friend. Why is he respected? I have no idea, but that's good when you play him! We never go to Orloff's place, we don't know where he lives, we know very little about him and that's good. We have to let the audience fill in the gaps.

**Did you ask yourself about the bond, the past that he shares with Gu?**

**Jacques Dutronc:** I never try to discover the sidelines or the past of a part. That doesn't help with my performance. I prefer to take inspiration from what I feel once I am in costume, on the set, with the other actors. Orloff appreciates Gu because he is a genuine and pure man, not a worm. Plus, he has a pretty lady friend...

**Orloff refuses to kill. Because he has in the past or because he never has?**

**Jacques Dutronc:** I'd prefer him to be specialized in well-planned heists without ever having shed any blood. Orloff isn't the kind of man who kills just to get his hands on a pile of money. There are two kinds of crooks. Those who have morals and no scruples, and those who have scruples but no morals. Orloff moves between the two, depending on whom he is dealing with. I would say that he has morals and no scruples. But just how far do morals go?

### **Did you want to be in the film right away?**

**Jacques Dutronc:** Giovanni by Corneau, quite frankly who would hesitate? I met José Giovanni once. A wonderful man. Everything he says is good. It should be taught in schools. He had true ethics, linked to the values of his time. Each period has its style of gangsters. Today, there are crooks who work in computing, banking and insider trading. There are still a few rocket attacks on bullion vans but that's another approach, another mentality, that no longer works with the same hierarchy. In Giovanni's day, there was a sort of referee or attorney in the underworld, an Armenian, who settled arguments. When two guys clashed, they'd go to see him. He handed down his decision and they respected it. It all went smoothly, no one questioned his rulings. Orloff made me think of him. He acts as a go-between for his pal Gu, he takes risks, he knuckles down, with his "heat" in his pocket...

### **Actors often say that the costume helps them get into a part...**

**Jacques Dutronc:** Ah, but this one is tailor-made! It goes with the Bentley, a real one with the wheel on the right, so that Orloff can kiss the woman in the passenger seat more easily. It's funny but the name Orloff reminds me of my childhood. On my street, the Chaussée d'Antin in Paris, there was a gourmet grocery with salmon in the window: the shop was called Orloff. The man I play studied in England, explaining the Anthony Eden hat perhaps. When I arrived on the set, in costume, Alain told me that José would have been delighted to see Orloff like that...

### **You had never worked with Alain Corneau before...**

**Jacques Dutronc:** With him, you really feel that you're in the presence of a true filmmaker. Personally, I think he's the only one left. A good job he's the picture of health! On a human level he's incredible. He has a sort of halo. He's a wonderful person. When there's a gun around or we talk about guns, his eyes light up and I like that passion. Corneau doesn't psychoanalyse the characters. What he asks for is very precise, his screenplay is also very precise and some lines are difficult to say. It's in a very special style. Nothing is stressed. It's clear and precise. No unnecessary words. When he came to my place in Corsica to offer me the part, I said yes right away, it was an honour

for me. When he left, I sent him a text message: “Thank you for coming, signed Orloff.” In one afternoon, I changed my name, I asked everyone to call me Orloff.

### **Tell us about your partners...**

**Jacques Dutronc:** My partner is blond but she isn't a dumb one because, originally, she is a brunette... She is very pretty and perfect for the part. You draw curves in the air with your hands when you talk about her. She is also very friendly. Since the film is excellent, there's bound to be a sequel in which she'll be called Simona. And Orloff will then choose to be called Stanislas... Eric Cantona is fantastic. I'm sorry that I don't have a scene with him. As for Blot, dear Michael White, I talk about him in the film but I never meet him.

### **You're the only one who pronounces Fardiano with a Corsican accent...**

**Jacques Dutronc:** It's only natural. I couldn't let that slip by... I wanted to direct a film in Corsica a long time ago. The star was Corsica, seen by me. I put the tourists in the light and the Corsicans in the shadows... My favourite book is called “In Praise of Shadows” by Junichirô Tanizaki. You know, I bet Orloff has that book in his library...

## INTERVIEW

## ERIC CANTONA

**Tell us how you see Alban, your character...**

**Eric Cantona:** On reading the screenplay, you realize that he is a loyal and dignified guy with a special form of sensitivity. He is a killer but he is also capable of great generosity towards the people he loves, in other words Manouche and Gu. He has decided to give them what he is. He needs to love and since he loves them he will do anything for them, giving them all he has and even killing for them too.

**Did you imagine a past for him?**

**Eric Cantona:** Yes, namely his past relationship with Gu. Alban is like a lost child, he needs to be guided. He dedicates himself to others, that is how he finds his place. He has chosen a family for himself and is totally devoted to it. It's a mission that he has given himself. In Alban's eyes, Gu can do no wrong. Gu is somebody strong for him, whatever happens. When Gu renounces killing Jo Ricci, he immediately finds an excuse for him, "I've put things off too before, it has to feel right." And, on meeting Blot when he goes back there, he feels proud because he tells himself, "Gu wasn't scared, his instinct told him not to do it." He needs to admire him.

**Did you find your bearings right away on the set?**

**Eric Cantona:** The first day was important because, before you arrive on the set, you build up your character on your own and, once you're on the set, you introduce it to the director, you have to deal with his expectations. So when you arrive on the first day, you're worried, you wonder if you're on the right track. To find that out, you have to act. With this film, there were a few adjustments to be made and then we quickly found Alban.

### **What do you think of Alban?**

**Eric Cantona:** He embodies values that have a meaning for me. Then again, a lot of people fantasize about the world of gangsters, although I don't feel very close to it. Even though they have a code of honour, they're killers. They fascinate me but I wouldn't choose to be on their side in real life. I don't have a great deal of admiration for them. In real life, they're fine where they are and I'm fine where I am. But, for the cinema, they provide good stories...

### **Are you comfortable with the way the characters speak?**

**Eric Cantona:** It's the dialogue of the period but, at the same time, I find it really modern. You could talk like that now, using these words from the end of the 1950s. I could use them today.

### **Alban's originality, in addition to his way of speaking, lies in what he radiates...**

**Eric Cantona:** Alban has the soul of a child in a sturdily built body. He behaves with Manouche and Gu like a child with his parents. He is a child. He will never leave and he is hurt when Gu suggests the idea. He feels abandoned when he is advised to leave them because his goal in life is to be with them and devote himself to them. He is happy that way.

### **You seem to enjoy acting a lot...**

**Eric Cantona:** I love it. I act for the fun of it, to feel alive, to try something different. When I act, I try to forget the outcome and focus on the present moment. I enjoy getting under the skin of people who aren't me. For instance, in playing Alban, it's the first time in my life that I've played someone so devoted. In real life, I've had people who were devoted to me rather than the opposite. Maybe a form of pride which make me flee people to whom I could become devoted. Maybe I have an inflated ego but there's a great deal of humility too. I don't look for people devoted to me, or people to devote myself too. So, in playing Alban, I didn't know where I was going. But I've known enough devoted people to take my inspiration from them. It's pleasant being devoted in a film.

## **How would you describe Alain Corneau?**

**Eric Cantona:** The man is a film encyclopaedia. I'm fascinated by the extent of his knowledge. I don't know if I know as much about soccer as he does about the cinema... Film history is more complex than football history.

When you know things, when you know your field, you think that everything is simple. But when you don't know so much, you listen and, that way, you learn. That's why I stay on the set. I like to watch the work unfold. I like being there, among the others, with them like that, you feel less of a stranger when you shoot your scenes. I watch, I try to learn. For instance, today, Corneau wanted a slow motion sequence at 50 images a second. In fact, you have to shoot faster to get slow motion. I learnt that today. It is important to get to know the technical side. To describe Corneau, I would talk about his knowledge. He masters the technique perfectly, so he is free, and he knows exactly what he wants. If an actor lets go and accepts everything that a director says to him, that means he trusts him to take him where he has to go. On this set we all trust him. No one questions his decisions. The place he is taking us is where we have to be...

*The interviews for this press kit were carried out during shooting by Michèle Pétin ~ Producer*

## **ARP A Reel Passion**

Since 1991, ARP, an independent French distribution company, has bought and released all rights more than one hundred films. ARP has also been producing since ten years.

- In 1997      ARP partners:  
With the Dardenne brothers on the production of “The promise” and “Rosetta”, Palme d’Or winner in 1999.  
With Luc Besson with whom ARP produces “Taxi” and coproduces “Taxi 2,3 and 4”.
- In 2000      “Murderous maids” directed by Jean-Pierre Denis reveals the talent of French actress Sylvie Testud.
- In 2001      “The officer’s ward” directed by François Dupeyron will earn nine nominations at the French “César” including best picture, best director and best actor.  
“La repentie” directed by Laetitia Masson and starring Isabelle Adjani and Sami Frey.
- In 2002      “Adolphe” directed by Benoît Jacquot with Isabelle Adjani, Stanislas Merhar and Jean Yanne, based on the famous Benjamin Constant’s novel.
- In 2003      “Mr Ibrahim” directed by François Dupeyron based on Eric Emmanuel Schmitt’s play, starring Omar Sharif.  
“Bon Voyage” directed by Jean-Paul Rappeneau with Isabelle Adjani, Gérard Depardieu, Virginie Ledoyen and Peter Coyote.  
“Feelings” in coproduction with Claude Berri directed by Noemie Lvovsky, starring Nathalie Baye, Jean-Pierre Bacri, Isabelle Carré.
- In 2004      “Words in blue” directed by Alain Corneau with Sylvie Testud and Sergi Lopez, in competition at the Berlin Film Festival.
- In 2005      “Olé!” directed by Florence Quentin, with Gérard Depardieu, Gad Elmaleh, Sabine Azéma and Valeria Golino.



- In 2006 “Try me” directed by Pierre-François Martin-Laval, with Julie Depardieu, Pierre Richard, Kad Merad, Isabelle Nanty and Marina Foïs.  
 “A crime” directed by Manuel Pradal with Harvey Keitel, Emmanuelle Béart, and Norman Reedus, shot in English in New York.
- In 2007 “Second wind” directed by Alain Corneau, based on José Giovanni’s novel, starring Daniel Auteuil, Monica Bellucci, Michel Blanc, Jacques Dutronc, Eric Cantona, Daniel Duval, Gilbert Melki, Nicolas Duvauchelle, Philippe Nahon, Jacques Bonnaffé.

### **Prizewinners**

In fifteen years, two Palme d’Or (“Raise the red lantern”, “Rosetta”), one Golden Lion (“Story of Qiu Ju”) two Silver Lions (“Raise the red lantern”, “Jamon, Jamon”) two Cannes Grand Prizes (“To Live!”, “The sweet hereafter”), Three Cannes Jury Prizes (“The puppetmaster”, “Songs from the second floor”, “Shanghai dreams”), six Best Actor/Actress prizes (“The madness of King George”, “Story of Qiu Ju”, “To Live”, “Nil by mouth”, “Rosetta”, “Nobody knows”) one Berlin Best Actress Prize (“Maria full of grace”), “one César for Best Actor (“Mr Ibrahim”), One Academy Award (“Antonia’s line”) seventeen Academy Award nominations (“Madness of king George”, “The shawshank redemption”, “The sweet hereafter”, “ Far from heaven”, “Maria full of grace”).

ARP’s French productions have gain twenty César nominations for “Murderous maids”, “The officer’s ward”, “Feelings”, “Bon Voyage”, “Mr Ibrahim”, and all have been nominated as “Best Film of the Year”.

## FICHE ARTISTIQUE

	<i>Gu</i>	Daniel Auteuil	
	<i>Manouche</i>	Monica Bellucci	
	<i>Blot</i>	Michel Blanc	
	<i>Orloff</i>	Jacques Dutronc	
	<i>Alban</i>	Eric Cantona	
	<i>Venture Ricci</i>	Daniel Duval	
	<i>Jo Ricci</i>	Gilbert Melki	
	<i>Antoine</i>	Nicolas Duvauchelle	
	<i>Pascal</i>	Jacques Bonnaffé	
	<i>Fardiano</i>	Philippe Nahon	
	<i>Théo</i>	Jean-Paul Bonnaire	
<i>Letourneur</i>	Francis Renaud	<i>Jacques le notaire</i>	Jean-Claude Dauphin
<i>Poupon</i>	Stéphane Brel	<i>Fernand</i>	Yves Lambrecht
<i>Godefroy</i>	Philippe Chaine	<i>Flic Restau Manouche</i>	Michel Vivier
<i>Chef</i>	Gérald Laroche	<i>Infirmière</i>	Sandra Moreno
<i>Bernard</i>	Fabrice Donnio	<i>Le Malade</i>	Bernard Bolzinger
<i>Flic Fardiano</i>	Alexandre Faure	<i>Journaliste Carnet</i>	Jean-Pierre Leclerc
<i>Marcel le Stéphanois</i>	Benoît Ferreux	<i>Colette</i>	Virginie Theron
<i>Tueurs Restau Manouche</i>	Cyrille Dobbels	<i>Les Journalistes</i>	Laurent Besançon
	Didier Nobletz		Thierry Humbert
<i>Portier Restau Manouche</i>	Christian Ameri	<i>Fred</i>	Charlie Farnell

## FICHE TECHNIQUE

*Un film de*  
**Alain Corneau**

*Produit par*  
**Michèle et Laurent Pétin**

*Adaptation*  
**Alain Corneau**

*Dialogues*  
**José Giovanni et Alain Corneau**

*D'après l'ouvrage de*  
**José Giovanni**  
*Editions Gallimard © 1958*

*Image*  
**Yves Angelo**

*Musique originale composée et orchestrée par*  
**Bruno Coulais**

*Décors*  
**Thierry Flamand - A.D.C.**

*Costumes*  
**Corinne Jorry**

*Son*

Pierre Gamet  
Laurent Quaglio  
Gérard Lamps

*Montage*  
Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte

*Directeur de Production*  
Bernard Bolzinger

*une production*  
ARP

*en co-production avec*  
TFI Films Production

*avec la participation de*  
Canal +  
Cinecinema  
Kiosque  
Sogecinema 4 & Sogecinema 5

*et le soutien de*  
La Région Ile-de-France

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Enregistré par	Philippe LAFFONT	Vibraphone	Franck TORTILLER
	Au Studio Rudolfinum (Dvorak Hall)	Trompette	Nicolas FOLMER
Enregistrement Système	Atmos Spl 5.1 Brauner	Enregistré par	Philippe LAFFONT
	Jéroen VAN DER KLUGT		Au Studio Ferber
Organisation	Filharmonici	Mixé	Au Studio Claudia Sound
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