



**Lino Ventura**

**Jean-Paul Belmondo**

**A film by Claude Sautet**

**CLASSE  
TOUS  
RISQUES**

**RIALTO PICTURES PRESSBOOK**

# CLASSE TOUS RISQUES

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## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Director

**Claude Sautet**

Screenplay

**Claude Sautet**

**José Giovanni**

**Pascal Jardin**

Based on the novel by

**José Giovanni**

Cinematography

**Ghislain Cloquet**

Music

**Georges Delerue**

Editor

**Albert Jurgenson**

Executive Producer

**Robert Amon**

Producer

**Jean Darvey**

English translation/subtitles (2005)

**Lenny Borger**

Original French release: April 1960

France 1960 B&W

Aspect ratio: 1:1.66

Mono

In French with English subtitles

Running time: 103 minutes

**A RIALTO PICTURES RELEASE**

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## CAST

Abel Davos  
**Lino Ventura**

Eric Stark  
**Jean-Paul Belmondo**

Liliane  
**Sandra Milo**

Arthur Gibelin  
**Marcel Dalio**

Riton Vintran  
**Michel Ardan**

Raoul Fargier  
**Claude Cerval**

Thérèse Davos  
**Simone France**

Sophie Fargier  
**Michèle Méritz**

Raymond  
**Stan Krol**

Bénazet  
**Charles Blavette**

Denise Vintran  
**France Asselin**

Jeannot  
**Aimé de March**

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## SYNOPSIS

At the Milan train station, Abel Davos puts his wife and two children on a train bound for Ventimiglia, a small town near the French border. Davos and his pal Raymond Naldi have a long history of robberies behind them, and Davos has been sentenced to death *in absentia* in France. Still, Italy has become too hot for them, so Paris now seems their best bet. But they're completely broke and need start-up money again.

The team tries their luck one more time in Milan. With authentic *savoir-faire*, they execute a daring robbery of two bank couriers in broad daylight, followed by a lightning-fast getaway via every conveyance available. Hotly pursued by the police, they manage to make their way safely to the French border.

Davos and Naldi arrive in Ventimiglia, where Thérèse has been waiting with the children. The next day they all leave for San Remo on a pleasure boat. Davos tosses the boat's owner overboard and commandeers the boat; that night, they land at a tiny inlet near Menton, on the French Riviera. A gun battle with customs officers ensues. Abel escapes with his two sons, but in the ensuing mêlée both Thérèse and Raymond are shot dead.

Abel winds up with his kids in Nice; he's now a "most wanted" criminal and hotter than ever in France. He calls some of his old gang in Paris, all living comfortable bourgeois existences; these include Riton Vintran, aka "Riton-of-the-Gates," now running a bistro, and Davos's ex-partner Raoul Fargier, once an ace safecracker, now a successful *hotelier*. Davos, in desperate need of help, naively thinks they'll re-pay some past favors.

But Abel's old cronies won't risk being near him, so Fargier hires Eric Stark, a complete stranger to Davos, to bring him to Paris from Nice. On the road at night, Eric rescues an actress, Liliane, from an abusive tour manager. With Stark disguised as an ambulance driver, Liliane dressed as a nurse and Davos heavily bandaged, they get through a roadblock outside Paris. The two men become fast friends.

In Paris, Abel soon learns that his old pals have no intention of helping him start a new life. Hiding out at Eric's flat, he leaves his kids in the care of a museum guard, an old friend of his father's. Turning his back on his underworld connections, he now goes it alone.

Eric and Liliane start seeing each other. Eric confesses to Abel his feelings for her. Abel tells Eric he thinks his children would be better off forgetting him and changing their name.

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Suspecting that Davos has returned in Paris, the police call on Fargier, who reveals nothing, but only to protect himself. Meanwhile, needing money for his kids' education and for his own escape from France, Abel brazenly robs his former fence Arthur Gibelin at gunpoint. Upon hearing of this, Fargier sends a henchman to Eric's place to find him, but Abel has already fled.

After Eric explains the situation to him, Davos kills the two men he considers traitors, Gibelin and Fargier. The police are sure he's behind these murders and are soon hot on his trail. Eric finds the cops waiting at his flat. Eric is wounded and arrested as he tries to escape, but Abel manages to escape over the rooftops. Liliane visits Eric in prison. He reassures her that he'll soon be completely recovered and that the crime of harboring a fugitive won't cost him too much time in prison.

In a miserable hideout, Abel takes stock of his life. Intentionally or not, he seems to be the downfall of anyone who comes near him. As Davos wanders the boulevards of Paris, a voiceover says, "A few days later, Abel Davos was arrested. He was brought to trial, sentenced and executed."

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## BERTRAND TAVERNIER ON “CLASSE TOUS RISQUES”<sup>1</sup>

When looking back to the 1960s, people talk only of the New Wave. *Classe Tous Risques* was among the films that were unappreciated; many critics ignored it completely.

In the last line of my review of *Classe Tous Risques* (the first I ever published), I wrote, "Some patronizing people think it is a B film, but a B like Boetticher is better than a A like Allegret" ("un B comme Boetticher vaut mieux qu'un A comme Allegret").<sup>2</sup>

*Classe Tous Risques* is not a B film. It is one of the best French gangster films, tense and warm, elliptical and human, which revealed Jean-Paul Belmondo before *Breathless*<sup>3</sup> (the way he delivers with a touching smile "ce que j'ai de bien c'est mon gauche"<sup>4</sup> is unforgettable). Based on a very good book by José Giovanni (whose other books and screenplays include Becker's *Le Trou* and Melville's *Le Deuxième Souffle*), it is also a beautiful friendship story with Hawksian undertones.

I have never forgotten the superb opening of the film, the very moving first voiceover, the beautifully filmed robbery (which even impressed Robert Bresson), the abrupt, unsentimental and poignant ending. And in between, many original and inspired moments: a meeting in a church, the relationship between Lino Ventura and a little maid, which really deal, beyond the rules of the genre, with "les choses de la vie."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> from a letter to Rialto Pictures, October 2005

<sup>2</sup> Budd Boetticher (1916-2001), writer/director of action pictures, most famous for a series of superior B Westerns (as well as one great bullfighting picture). Yves Allégret (1907-1987), director who became the poster child for the "cinéma de qualité," a traditional style abhorred by the Cahiers du Cinéma critics.

<sup>3</sup> The two films were made and released back-to-back. Principal photography on *Breathless* was completed in September 1959, while *Classe Tous Risques* began shooting in October. *Breathless* was released in March 1960, with *Classe* following in April.

<sup>4</sup> "the best thing about me is my left"

<sup>5</sup> Literally, "the little things in life," but also a reference to Sautet's popular 1970 film "*Les choses de la vie*," starring Michel Piccoli and Romy Schneider, the first of his slice-of-bourgeois-life chamber films.

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## JOHN WOO ON “CLASSE TOUS RISQUES”<sup>6</sup>

This early Sautet makes us feel compassionate toward the robber/gangster played matter-of-factly (and brilliantly) by Lino Ventura, while abhorred at his cruelty in seeking vengeance. This portrait, filled with honesty and humility, is what makes this film so powerful and timeless.

## JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE ON “CLASSE TOUS RISQUES”<sup>7</sup>

I offer my friendship rarely. I have reached the age where one can only give it in exchange; the calculation of a miser who wants something for his money.

The more valuable the compensation, the more solid the friendship.

Sautet, by allowing me to admire him, has left me completely fulfilled. This young man of such maturity has taught us a lesson in discretion and efficiency that does not seem especially valued at a time when we see that only the snobbery imposed by the customers of a five-and-dime make and destroy talents and values (*A Woman Is a Woman*, *Jules and Jim*<sup>8</sup>).

If I am certain that in 1965 Claude Sautet will be our greatest filmmaker, it is because, aside from his talent, I admire his quiet courage. And whereas, to make a film, we all know at least a hundred pseudo-directors ready to commit every infamy, Sautet, the false silent type, waits to be inspired to shoot.

But when he shoots, he puts his heart into his work.

Never has Lino Ventura shown as much heart as in *Classe Tous Risques*, despite appearing there alongside a Belmondo unknown, powerful, serious, as true as a true man.

The secret of artistic creation remains, along with vulgarity, one of the only two absolute mysteries.

(continued on next page)

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<sup>6</sup> from a letter to Rialto Pictures, August 2005; Woo has called *Classe Tous Risques* one of his favorite film noirs.

<sup>7</sup> originally appeared as “The Quiet Courage of a Great Filmmaker” in *Présence du Cinéma*, No. 12, March-April 1962 (translated by Robert Gray, 2005)

<sup>8</sup> early 60s New Wave films directed, respectively, by Godard and Truffaut

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It cannot be learned. In cinema or in any other field. In 1896 Picasso had never taken a single lesson, nor had Erroll Garner<sup>9</sup> in 1945.

The train station in Milan, the post office in Nice, the Doisy passage... Sautet did not learn these in the films of others.

Imagine for an instant that the story took place in the United States or Mexico or Canada, with Robert Ryan and Sinatra, and tell me if, thus transposed, Sautet would not be one of the greats over there.

Tell me if he could not have made *Some Came Running*, *Odds Against Tomorrow*, *The Hustler* or *The Asphalt Jungle*<sup>10</sup>.

People often speak of films where the relationship between men, their friendship, have an enormous importance. I believed in the friendship of Abel Davos and Stark, absolutely. It is interior, and does not appear by means of dialogue. The two men's behavior makes explicit their feelings, without either of them having to speak of their friendship. That is partly why I was not able to believe in the friendship of Jules and Jim, even though they speak of it often.

Of course, I am not opposing the Sautet technique and the Truffaut technique: absolute classicism and the new cinema are two forms of the same art. It remains to be seen if, in 1965, both will still exist or if one, alone, will still exist.

## JOSE GIOVANNI ON "CLASSE TOUS RISQUES"<sup>11</sup>

Jacques Becker<sup>12</sup> gave Lino Ventura [my book]. Ventura read it and said to me, "If you agree, I'll play the leading role." He then asked me if I wanted to recommend a particular director for the job. A legitimate question. I knew no one, so I had no one to recommend. This was in 1958 and I'd been out of prison eighteen months. He said, "I know someone who's never done a film, who I've had as an assistant, but I'm sure he's talented." We met at night, in the Bois de Boulogne. Molinaro was shooting a scene<sup>13</sup> in which taxi drivers lit their

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<sup>9</sup> Jazz pianist (1921-1977); completely self-taught, he never learned to read music.

<sup>10</sup> Hollywood movies directed by, respectively, Vincente Minnelli, Robert Wise, Robert Rossen and John Huston.

<sup>11</sup> This interview with the author of the original novel and the co-screenwriter is excerpted from the 2004 documentary *Claude Sautet ou la magie invisible*, directed by N.T. Binh.

<sup>12</sup> Famed director Jacques Becker had directed such films as *Touchez-pas au Grisbi* and *Casque d'Or*. Sautet worked as his assistant and became a close friend.

<sup>13</sup> Director Yves Molinaro, then shooting a scene for *Un Témoin dans la Ville*.

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headlights and trained them on Ventura. I arrived and saw a guy smoking – Claude smoked a lot – and who had his collar turned up. I said, “You’re Claude Sautet?” He said, “Yes.” He said, “I read your book.” That’s how it began.

Sautet was interested in the theme of the downfall because he didn’t want to defend criminals. He wanted to tell the story of a guy who’s done for, whatever he’s done, he’s lost and ends up coming to grief.

## CLAUDE SAUTET ON “CLASSE TOUS RISQUES”<sup>14</sup>

What encouraged me was when I was with Georges Franju, when we did *Eyes Without A Face*<sup>15</sup>. I saw how he managed, with a deep-rooted tenacity, to make the film he wanted. It encouraged me and I thought, “I may manage to make a film even with someone else’s script.” That’s how I decided I could make *Classe Tous Risques*. What I liked about the film was its physical side. Physical presence produces an intensity that I hardly see in French cinema, which often negotiates a lot through dialogue... We reduced commentary to just a few sentences, to capture the characters’ physical anguish. The beginning of the film was shot in this exciting climate. It’s the emotion I personally feel when I refer to “pure cinema,” in which music, sculpture, choreography, the body, the mystery of faces possess their own eloquence and lyricism.

The most personal aspect comes from the fate of the main character. The fact that he hits rock bottom. He was a big gang leader reduced to petty crime. The notion of surrender.... I realized that this was more than just another cop movie. It was maybe more influenced by Italian cinema. This sort of deprivation in which the character finds himself. Ventura, he loves action. He was a wrestler before. He even knows how to act mean in action. What helped in *Classe Tous Risques* was his sense of peremptory violence. It was fantastic. It lasts three seconds, incredible speed. In this regard, I learned a lot from Ventura. And I’ve used it in all my films. I’ve always made short violent scenes. Scenes that provide relief, that end impotence.

The film didn’t do well when it first came out. It did well when it came out again about ten years later. The producers got their money back. Three, four times over. They were delighted. It was completely unforeseen.

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<sup>14</sup> from an interview in the 2004 documentary *Claude Sautet ou la magie invisible*, directed by N.T. Binh.

<sup>15</sup>Franju’s 1959 horror movie was re-released by Rialto Pictures in 2003; Sautet was assistant director.

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH CLAUDE SAUTET

*Did you feel ready to become a director?*

Yes, but I didn't quite realize the difficulty involved. I thought I was stronger than I was. Encouraged by Lino [Ventura] and Jacques Becker, I thought that I could avoid the traps. However, after four or five months of enthusiastic work with José Giovanni, with whom I got along perfectly, I realized that the direction we had taken ran counter to the producers' vision, and the conflicts began. They maintained you couldn't have as a hero someone who roughs up bank couriers and kills customs officers; we had to drop this and that, in fact abandon everything that had motivated me about the project. At a certain point the producers wanted nothing more to do with Giovanni and rejected our screenplay. I felt like giving up. Lino supported me up to a point. He had faith in me, but he was worried I no longer had enough faith in myself. And he wasn't necessarily wrong. In a panic, the producers asked me to talk to Morris Ergaz, the Italian co-producer who, in return for my casting his girlfriend Sandra Milo, defended the story as it was.

*What had interested you in the story?*

It was seeing two men on the run, lost in a city, Milan. Former mobsters, big bank robbers reduced to committing some pathetic crime: in other words, the theme of downfall. With Lino Ventura down and out, in his only suit, who has nowhere left to go, and who is ashamed of himself. It wasn't only a gangster film, but a film about the end of the traditional underworld and its flamboyant ways. The producers would have liked it to end guns blazing. But a spectacular ending was impossible, given the psychological state of the Abel/Lino character. Nevertheless, I couldn't find the ending. It was only while editing that Ghislain Cloquet, the cameraman, pointed out that since we had started in the street, we could also end in the street. With Abel, alone in the crowd, on the Boulevard des Italiens. And that's what we shot. With Giovanni's help, we found this simple line of commentary, "Several days later, Abel Davos was arrested. He was tried, found guilty, and executed."

*It was a way of picking up from the voice-over of the beginning...*

Yes. For the beginning, we started by trying to show the life of the two characters in Milan without any commentary. But it was much too long, and I was looking for a contraction -- hence the voice-over that begins by referring to Abel's wife<sup>16</sup> and children. It provided the necessary information while adding a certain lyricism.

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<sup>16</sup> played by José Giovanni's sister, Simone France.

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When I first began working on the project, I wanted most of the film to take place in Milan, in an almost neo-realist context, and to end when Stark/Belmondo comes to help Abel. But the producers had bought the rights to the novel about a cross-country crime spree. And Lino insisted on that as well. All that was left was for me to treat a noir-ish love story through harsh violence, a willfully impoverished and anti-literary language. I saw it as an opportunity to make a French film with all that I'd learned from the American B movies.

*What was Pascal Jardin's contribution to your script?*

When we had our falling out with the producers, we had to find an intermediary to rework the screenplay. Pascal Jardin, who was just starting out, humbly limited himself to rewriting a simpler screenplay in a more flattering language. Without changing anything of the structure or the dialogue or the visual intentions.

*What were your intentions in the directing?*

I wanted something that would develop from the description of physical behavior. The situation in itself is so strong that the desperation of Abel's character suffices as an inner dimension. My method consisted of laying out the strategy of a scene as a whole, though leaving room for creativity, and very precise reference points. Then I filmed a number of takes of a wide shot of the scene. The advantage is that the action becomes authentic, with all the hesitations of reality, like something you're truly witnessing, and that dictated my blocking. All that was left was to reconstitute the event in its entirety from different angles. That's what I did for the roadblock outside Milan. I had to create a strategy for the whole that forces the character to see the roadblock as an insurmountable obstacle, which it isn't really. I racked my brains to come up with the objective situation of a Western, into which the characters introduced their own subjectivity. The idea was to make something sudden and unexpected happen; for example, the moment when the motorcyclist swerves sharply off the highway. It's while shooting that the phenomenon arises of the encounter of a location and the actors, provoking inspiration. The best parts of *Classe Tous Risques* came from that...

*Do you remember the first day of shooting in the streets of Milan in October 1959?*

I was in a frenzy of course. We started with the scene where the two unfortunate bank couriers are roughed up on Via Orefici, which was crowded with people. The Italian crew had a lot of experience with shooting in the street, which made my work a lot easier. We had rehearsed the action at midnight, the previous night, with the main actors and six or seven extras. The next morning, in the

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midst of the throngs invading the streets, everything went as planned. Except that passers-by began to run after the actors, thinking it was a real hold-up! It took an army of assistants to stop the people from beating them up.

*Are you more comfortable on location or in the studio?*

At the time I didn't feel comfortable in the studio. When much of a film takes place on location, it's very difficult to make the studio sequences match the rest. It's a problem of atmosphere and lighting. That's what I learned making this film. On location, you're almost always forced to use short focal lengths, because you can't pull back, whereas in the studio you can use longer lenses. But the big problem remained lighting, and how to maintain a unity between the light on location and the light in the Francoeur<sup>17</sup> studios.

*What do you remember about shooting in the street, among the crowds?*

The light was very low. After each shot Cloquet told me, "I think it's okay. But I can't guarantee that we'll be able to tell if it's Lino or Marilyn [Monroe] on the screen!" I got along well with Cloquet, who was a bit of a dour young man, but who liked and understood the film. The Italian extras were extremely conscientious. One of them, who was playing a *carabiniere*<sup>18</sup>, was knocked unconscious off-camera and remained lying on the sidewalk after we cut. An ambulance pulled up without our realizing. Inside, he kept playing his part until he reached the hospital, thinking he was still being filmed.

*And how did the Italian co-producer behave?*

He was absolutely perfect. Two-thirds of the way through filming, having been paid the strict minimum, I had no money left. I was shooting outdoors in freezing weather in summer shoes. Sandra Milo couldn't believe it. So I explained that they were the only shoes I had. She told Ergaz, who made me an offer: "I'll take you on contract as a screenwriter for so much per month. If you also direct, the sum will be doubled." I accepted. He wrote his agreement on a banknote, tore it in half, and gave me one of the pieces. "Tomorrow, with your half of the note, you can collect two million [old francs] at the bar of the Raphaël Hotel." I didn't really take him seriously, and I forgot to go. He called me on the phone, furious. I went, I saw the barman, I handed him my half of the note and pocketed the two million, which covered my expenses until the end of shooting.

*Lino Ventura chose you, but you had to choose the other actors...*

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<sup>17</sup> In Paris on Montmartre hill. The FEMIS film school occupies the premises now.

<sup>18</sup> Italian policeman

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I'd seen Belmondo in [Marcel Carné's] *Les Tricheurs*, but couldn't remember his name. I tried describing him to people and learned that his name was Belmondo. Giovanni phoned him and asked if he could come to my apartment. An hour later he arrived, thin, silent, with the wonderful smile he had at the time. I outlined the plot. He said to me, "Alright!" Next I presented him to Lino, who found him terrific. He saw him as his son, something that often happens between actors. I never had any problems with Jean-Paul, who was always extremely relaxed, available, with the youthful casualness that he kept until *Pierrot le fou*. But Bob Amon did not want him at any price. He had produced Chabrol's film *Un Double tour*, and found Belmondo awful in it. He wanted a star. He had me meet Alain Delon, Laurent Terzieff, Gérard Blain, but none of them would accept unless we expanded the role. But the best was the day Bob Amon took me by the arm and told me, with an inspired look, "I just had a brainstorm: Dario Moreno!" I was speechless. Dario Moreno, a famous crooner, very well-padded, simply because he'd just been a huge hit in [Clouzot's] *The Wages of Fear*. I was finally able to get out of that with the support of the Italian co-producer. At the time, Belmondo hadn't appeared in anything but the film by Chabrol.

*The care you took in casting supporting roles is evident.*

The fact of having been an assistant director taught me their importance. The meeting with [actor Marcel] Dalio was magnificent. He was a consummate craftsman who understood everything. He could sink his teeth into playing a tragic-comic bastard. Blavette had been in Renoir's *Toni*. It was an honor for me that he accepted a small role. At that time, I was uncomfortable with Claude Cerval's slightly precious diction, but now I find him very good. Then there were Bernard Dhéran, René Génin, Jacques Dacqmine, Michel Ardan, who went on to become a producer, Michèle Meritz, a future agent with Artmédia. To play Naldi, Abel's companion on the lam, I chose Stan Krol, a kid Giovanni knew from prison, who occasionally dropped by to visit us while we were writing. He had the physicality of Lino and of American actors. Sandra Milo wasn't bad, but she had to be dubbed because of her accent. To be honest, I wasn't that concerned with the female character, I wasn't mature enough! So I didn't pay too much attention to her hairdo and makeup. I just went along...

*How did Lino behave on set?*

As the shooting proceeded, Lino realized that his character, a loser, was in a more critical situation than he'd thought. And that demoralized him somewhat.

*Did you know, while making the film, the identity of the person who had served as Giovanni's model for Abel's character?*

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If I had known, I might not have made the film. I was not aware that Abel Danos - Davos in the film - had belonged to the Bony-Lafont gang during the Occupation<sup>19</sup>. It was only after the film was released that one day in a bistro some underworld types tipped me off, "It's great that you made a film about Abel!"

*While preparing the film, were you familiar with the underworld?*

"Familiar with" is saying a lot. I had a minimum of contact with it, which helped me to straighten out the inevitably picturesque vision you have of gangsters. They liked to drink champagne. Aside from their sinister activities, they seemed polite, friendly.

*At the time, what is your take on the film? The result of a compromise...*

...that I'm not ashamed of. Today, first and foremost, I think of those who are no longer with us. Aside from Belmondo and myself, everyone is dead, cast as well as crew. I remember the moments of euphoria while working. The thought is almost unbearable. I also have to say that the audience did not show up! The film was a failure. Bob Amon used the opportunity to tell me, "You see, we needed to find a different ending. And you should have listened to me about the title!" At the beginning of shooting he had suggested, quite seriously, calling the film simply, *Pray For Me!* or *Pray For Them!* The reviews were good, but filmmakers have a compulsion for poring over the bad articles. I remember the one in *Combat*, my old newspaper, "As for the directing, there's no point in naming the author, because it's lousy." And I thought to myself, "Two years of my life for this!"

*Do you remember your first interview for Classe Tous Risques?*

Yes, with a very young Bertrand Tavernier<sup>20</sup>. I believe he was then in law school. He was enthusiastic, and not just for my film. He had an enthusiastic nature. Later, he asked me to see his father to explain that the movies were a profession like any other, and that he needn't worry if his son chose that field. I think I managed to reassure him. Bertrand enjoyed a little more elbow room after that.

*Did you show the film to any friends before it was released?*

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<sup>19</sup> Two criminals, former inspector Bony and Henry Chamberlain, known as Lafont, "helped" the Gestapo.

<sup>20</sup> Tavernier's article, "I Hate Compromises," appeared in *Cinéma 60* magazine. See page 5 for Tavernier's reminiscence about the article, Sautet and *Classe Tous Risques*.

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To Jacques Becker. I showed him the work print. He complimented me, while regretting that the Italian part was not more developed, which was my feeling too. [Director Henri-Georges] Clouzot arranged a screening without me. He spoke about it with me at length, wanting to know how I'd shot this and that, which he always loved to do. Later, there was [director Georges] Franju, and especially [director Jean-Pierre] Melville, who defended me very strongly<sup>21</sup>.

*Melville was even, I believe, a strong supporter of the film.*

First I got a phone call from him; he was incredibly warm. And then, one night, at a "ciné-club" in a suburb -- Sarcelles, I believe -- where they were showing *Classe Tous Risques*, I was surprised to spot him wearing his big Stetson. After the screening, when people started asking me questions, he got up and answered for me, far better than I could have done! He began to analyze each scene, each shot, with such enthusiasm that I could just sit back in my seat. I was delighted at what he said, also because he spared me the chore of having to answer. The situation repeated itself in another suburb, with Jean-Pierre on his feet, haranguing the audience. It was as comical as it was moving. We saw each other often after that. He screened his films for me before they came out, in an empty theater.

*All through the film we have the impression of viewing something very free and at the same time very thought out.*

It always comes back to problems of construction, a construction that was very much centered on the physical movements of the main characters. At 34, you are tireless when it comes to difficult scenes. With age, there's a tendency to save your energies.

*When Classe Tous Risques was re-released in Paris in 1971, the film was a hit...*

Yes, a group of cinephiles, the "MacMahoniens"<sup>22</sup>, re-released it on a double bill with King Vidor's *Man Without A Star*.<sup>23</sup> I was worried about the comparison, but my little film held up.

-- From *Conversations Avec Claude Sautet* by Michel Boujut (Institute Lumiere/Actes Sud © 1994, 2001; translated by Robert Gray, 2005)

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<sup>21</sup> See Jean-Pierre Melville's tribute to Sautet, page 6.

<sup>22</sup> particularly zealous film fanatics, a nickname derived from the devotees of the Paris repertory cinema The MacMahon, on Avenue MacMahon (off the Etoile).

<sup>23</sup> The 1955 Western starred Kirk Douglas, Jeanne Crain, Claire Trevor and Melville favorite Richard Boone.

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## CLAUDE SAUTET (director/co-screenwriter)

Born in a suburb of Paris in 1924, Sautet was passionate about the fine arts from an early age. He began as a sculptor and then moved on to painting film sets. After the liberation, he worked as a social worker after joining the Communist Party (which he left in 1952), but remained involved in the arts. His focus shifted to music, an interest which remained with him for the rest of his life.

Between 1949 and 1950 he worked for the left wing journal *Combat* as a music critic. Sautet claimed that he owed his love of the cinema to his grandmother, a film enthusiast, and after a chance meeting with a film editor during the war, his interest in filmmaking began in earnest. He called Marcel Carné's *Le Jour se lève* (1939) the "decisive factor that made me tumble into that strange profession." In his mid-20s, he began studying filmmaking at the newly formed Institute des Hautes Etudes Cinématographiques (IDHEC). He made his first short film, *Nous n'irons plus au bois* (1951), and then began working in the industry as an assistant director, most notably for directors Jacques Becker and Georges Franju (working on the latter's acclaimed horror film *Eyes Without A Face*).

In the interim he had made his feature directing debut, replacing another director, on *Bonjour sourire* (1955), a comedy with Louis de Funès that passed virtually unnoticed. Sautet would have to wait five years before being recognized as a significant director with *Classe Tous Risques* (1960). But with the New Wave movement in full swing, some critics saw Sautet's style as too orthodox and somewhat passé.

Sautet withdrew from directing his own films and took to screenwriting. Often called upon by fellow directors (Marcel Ophüls, Jacques Deray and Jean Becker among them), he earned the reputation as a master "script doctor" from Truffaut. Much of his work in this period concentrated on developing observations on love in its various dimensions. His delicately nuanced study of love resurfaces in his own films in the '70s and again in the 90s.

*Les Choses de la vie* (1970) marked the turning point for Sautet. He had found his muse in the Austrian-born actress Romy Schneider, who went on to star in many of his films in this period, including *Max et les ferrailleurs* (1971), *César et Rosalie* (1972), *Mado* (1976), and *Une Histoire simple* (1978) which won her a Best Actress César (the film was nominated for 11 Césars). It is also in this period, which is perhaps his most productive and fruitful, that he founded long-term friendships and collaborations with actors Michel Piccoli and Yves Montand, screenwriter Jean-Loup Dabadie, cinematographer Jean Boffety and composer Phillipe Sarde.

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His last three films, *Quelques jours avec moi* (1988), *Un Coeur en hiver* (1992), and *Nelly & Monsieur Arnaud* (1995) saw Sautet with new-found friendships in actors Daniel Auteuil and Emmanuelle Béart, and writer Jacques Fieschi. Somewhat belatedly, it was only his last two films that brought international critical acclaim to this director; both films were nominated and won a host of French and foreign awards, including the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival for *Un Coeur en hiver* and the Prix Louis Delluc for *Nelly & Monsieur Arnaud*.

Claude Sautet died on July 22, 2000 after a long battle with liver cancer. In an homage to Sautet, President Jacques Chirac hailed the director as one who “held out the mirror of our times.”

- Excerpted from *The Poetics of Melancholy* by Janice Tong on sensesofcinema.com

## LINO VENTURA (Abel Davos)

Born Angelo Borrini in Parma, Italy in 1919, Lino Ventura emigrated with his family to France at the age of eight. He found his first calling as a professional wrestler and fight manager. Ventura’s success in his debut appearance in *Touchez Pas Au Grisbi*<sup>24</sup> immediately brought him other screen parts, often as a heavy opposite Jean Gabin. In 1956, his popularity continued its upward arc when he embodied a muscle-bound French secret agent nicknamed The Gorilla in the first of a popular series of spy thrillers. He had a memorable role in Louis Malle’s debut feature *Elevator to the Gallows*<sup>25</sup> (1958) and the following year Claude Sautet cast him as the lead of his first major feature, *Classe Tous Risques*, in which Ventura began to show the instinctive talents that would make him one of France’s best-loved stars. He became a certified French movie star with the 1961 war movie *A Taxi for Tobruk*.

Though often restricted to roles of gangsters and tough guys, Ventura displayed depth and subtlety behind his gruff, chunky exterior. He even moved easily into tongue-in-cheek comedy in Georges Lautner’s *Les Tontons Flingueurs* (1963) and two Claude Lelouch films, *Money Money Money (L’Aventure c’est l’aventure)*, (1971) and *A Pain the A... (L’Emmerdeur)*, (1973), in which he played the stone-faced foil to Jacques Brel’s suicidal schlemiel. Two of Ventura’s finest roles came under Jean-Pierre Melville’s direction, in *Le Deuxième Souffle* (1966) and the great French Resistance epic *Army of Shadows* (1969)<sup>26</sup>. He also turned in memorable performances in Francesco Rosi’s *Illustrious Corpses* (1975), Claude Miller’s *Garde à vue* (1981) and was a fine Jean Valjean in Robert Hossein’s *Les*

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<sup>24</sup> Released by Rialto Pictures in 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Currently in theatrical release by Rialto Pictures.

<sup>26</sup> Rialto Pictures will release *Army of Shadows*, which was selected for this year’s Telluride Film Festival, in spring 2006.

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*Misérables* (1981). Ventura died in 1987. A square in Montmartre bears the Italian-born actor's name.

## JEAN-PAUL BELMONDO (Eric Stark)

Born in Neuilly in 1933, the son of sculptor Paul Belmondo, Jean-Paul Belmondo studied acting at the Paris Conservatory and became a star overnight in Godard's *Breathless* (1960)<sup>27</sup>. The quintessential New Wave actor, Belmondo went on to work with most of the major directors of the 60s and 70s. He climaxed his Godardian phase with *Pierrot le fou* (1965), swashbuckled and globe-trotted in Philippe de Broca's *Cartouche* (1962) and *That Man from Rio* (1964), wore a cassock and a trenchcoat for Jean-Pierre Melville's *Léon Morin, prêtre* and *Le Doulos* (both 1961)<sup>28</sup>, romanced Catherine Deneuve in Truffaut's *Mississippi Mermaid* (1969), stood up to screen veterans Jean Gabin and Charles Vanel in Henri Verneuil's *Un Singe en hiver* (1962) and Melville's *L'Ainé des Ferchaux* (1963), and embodied one of the 20th century's most daring swindlers in Alain Resnais's *Stavisky* (1974).

By the late 1970s, Belmondo had abandoned art house films for action vehicles which shifted the dramatic emphasis from acting talent to acrobat prowess (Belmondo prided himself on being his own stuntman). By the mid-80s his popularity was on the wane, though he made a comeback of sorts in Claude Lelouch's *Itinéraire d'un enfant gâté* (1988) and *Les Misérables* (1995). His other recent credits include Patrice Leconte's *Half a Chance* (1998), Cedric Klapisch's *Peut-être* (1999) and Bernard Stora's made-for-television remake of *L'Ainé des Ferchaux* (2001), in which Belmondo reprised the role played by Charles Vanel in the 1963 version.

Owner of the prestigious Théâtre des Variétés in Paris, Belmondo made his stage comeback in 1987 and has portrayed Edmund Kean, Cyrano and Frédérick Lemaître (the brilliant ham actor of *Children of Paradise* fame) and starred in two Feydeau revivals. In 1999 and 2001, Belmondo suffered strokes that forced him into retirement.

At one time seen almost as a junior version of the pugnacious Lino Ventura, Belmondo was re-teamed with his *Classe Tous Risques* co-star in *Cent mille dollars au soleil* (aka *Greed in the Sun*, 1964). Though they first appeared together in Sautet's film, the 1971 reissue trailer for *Classe* heralded, "Belmondo and Ventura – Together Again!"

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<sup>27</sup> Belmondo starting shooting *Classe tous risques* immediately after *Breathless*.

<sup>28</sup> Both films are future Rialto Pictures releases.

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## **SANDRA MILO (Liliane)**

Born 1935 in Tunis, Milo made her film debut in 1955, opposite the great comic actor Alberto Sordi, in *Lo Scapolo*, and for the next decade appeared in dozens of Italian comedies, costume dramas and steamy melodramas. Her most memorable appearances were in Rossellini's *Generale Della Rovere* (1959) and *Vanina, Vanini* (1961), and in Fellini's *8 1/2* (1963) and *Juliet of the Spirits* (1965). Milo personified the aloof Italian temptress opposite Europe's sexiest leading men, including Vittorio Gassman, Marcello Mastroianni, and Jean-Paul Belmondo. She left films in 1968, but returned a decade later, playing character parts into the 1990s. In 2003 she appeared in Pupi Avati's *Un Cuore Altrove*. Her voice in *Classe Tous Risques* was dubbed by a French actress.

## **MARCEL DALIO (Arthur Gibelin)**

Born Marcel Blauchild in Paris in 1899, Dalio, the son of Romanian Jewish immigrants, enjoyed a busy career in theater, cabaret and music hall before embarking on a film career in the early 30s, notably in Robert Bresson's recently rediscovered debut comedy (!), *Les Affaires Publiques* (1934).

Apart from his two rightly famous roles in Renoir's *Grand Illusion* (1937) and *Rules of the Game* (1939), he was usually type cast as sinister Semites and foreigners, as in Duvivier's *Pépé le Moko* (1937) and Robert Siodmak's *Mollenard* (1937). Director Pierre Chenal gave him one of his rare starring roles in *La Maison du Maltais* (1938), in which he played an Arab vagabond and storyteller who falls in love with a prostitute.

Emigrating to the U.S. in 1940, Dalio began a second career playing stereotypical foreigners in dozens of Hollywood films, most famously as the croupier in *Casablanca* (1942) (he was so associated with the film, in fact, that he was promoted to Claude Rains' role of Captain Renault in the short-lived TV series of the 1950s). After the war he shuttled between Hollywood and Paris without ever finding a role to match the depth and humanity of those Renoir gave him. He made his last film in 1980 and died in 1983.

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## **GHISLAIN CLOQUET (cinematographer)**

Born in Belgium in 1924, Cloquet trained at the famous IDHEC film school in Paris after World War II. He began his career as lighting cameraman on Alain Resnais' famous short films *Les Statues meurent aussi* (1953), *Night and Fog* (1955) and *Toute la mémoire du monde* (1956). In 1960, he photographed Jacques Becker's final masterpiece, *Le Trou*, and Sautet's *Classe Tous Risques*. Working with equal mastery in black & white and color, Cloquet photographed Jacques Demy's *The Young Girls of Rochefort* (1967) and *Donkey Skin* (1970). He lit all the major films of his countryman André Delvaux, shot Louis Malle's *The Fire Within* (1963), and collaborated with Bresson on *Au Hasard Balthazar* (1966), *Mouchette* (1967) and *Une femme douce* (1969). Cloquet also worked with Marguerite Duras, Claude Berri and Nina Companeez. He worked with Arthur Penn on *Mickey One* (1965) and *Four Friends* (1981), and with Woody Allen on *Love and Death* (1975). Cloquet shared an Academy Award with Geoffrey Unsworth for their work on Roman Polanski's *Tess* (1979). Cloquet also worked in television.

## **JOSE GIOVANNI (novelist/co-screenwriter)**

Born 1923 in Paris, Giovanni held various jobs as a diver, lumberjack, coal miner and mountain guide, and joined the French resistance during World War II. After the war, Giovanni was arrested; his alleged links with a postwar criminal gang earned him a death sentence. But his father worked hard to earn his eventual release. (Giovanni later turned this story into his final film, *Mon père, il m'a sauvé la vie* [*My Father Saved My Life*], made in 2001).

Following his release from prison, Giovanni published his first novel *Le Trou*, based on his experience behind bars and participation in a prison break attempt. The success of the book earned him a screenwriting offers, and Giovanni

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scripted *Du rififi chez les femmes*<sup>29</sup> (1959). He then wrote the screenplay adaptation of *Le Trou* for director Jacques Becker.

Giovanni's novel *Les Aventuriers* spawned two films in 1967, *Les Aventuriers* (1967) directed by Robert Enrio with Lino Ventura and Alan Delon, and *La Loi du survivant* (1967), Giovanni's directorial debut. He would go on to direct a total of 15 films over his career including *La Scoumoune* (1972) with Jean-Paul Belmondo and *Deux hommes dans la ville* (1973), with Jean Gabin and Alain Delon.

Giovanni also acted in a handful of movies, including *La Repentie* (2002). He won awards in France for his crime novels and for his 1995 autobiography. Giovanni died in 2004

## GEORGES DELERUE (composer)

Georges Delerue, one of the most prolific and innovative composers in the history of cinema, was born in March 1925 in Roubaix, France. He won a scholarship to the Paris Conservatory and studied under the great composer Darius Milhaud. He worked as an orchestra leader on French television before scoring short films and several documentaries for Alain Resnais and Agnes Varda. He would eventually write scores for some of the most important French films of the 1960s, including Resnais's *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959), Truffaut's *Shoot the Piano Player* (1960) and *Jules and Jim* (1961), and Godard's *Contempt* (1963).

Among the many other masterworks he scored were Bernardo Bertolucci's *The Conformist* (1970) and many other films by Truffaut including *Two English Girls* (1971), *Day for Night* (1973), and *The Last Metro* (1980). He was Oscar-nominated for many of his British and American scores, including *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1969), *The Day of the Dolphin* (1973), *Julia* (1977), and *Agnes of God* (1985). He won for *A Little Romance* (1979). Delerue died in 1992.

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<sup>29</sup> No relation to Jules Dassin's masterpiece *Rififi – Du Rififi chez les homes* – just a rip-off of its famous title

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## RIALTO PICTURES

Described as “the gold standard of reissue distributors” by Los Angeles *Times*/NPR film critic Kenneth Turan, Rialto Pictures was founded in 1997 by Bruce Goldstein. A year later, Adrienne Halpern joined him as partner. In 2002, Eric Di Bernardo became the company’s National Sales Director.

Rialto’s past releases have included Renoir’s *Grand Illusion*; Carol Reed’s *The Third Man*; Fellini’s *Nights of Cabiria*; Jules Dassin’s *Rififi*; De Sica’s *Umberto D*; Godard’s *Contempt*, *Band of Outsiders* and *A Woman is a Woman*; Julien Duvivier’s *Pépé le Moko*; Buñuel’s *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *Diary of a Chambermaid*, *The Phantom of Liberty*, *The Milky Way* and *That Obscure Object of Desire*; John Schlesinger’s *Billy Liar*; Clouzot’s *Quai des Orfèvres*; Mike Nichols’ *The Graduate*; The Maysles’ *Grey Gardens*; Mel Brooks’ *The Producers*; Jacques Becker’s *Touchez-pas au Grisbi*; Bresson’s *Au Hasard Balthazar*; Franju’s *Eyes Without A Face*; and Jean-Pierre Melville’s *Bob le Flambeur* and *Le Cercle Rouge*.

In 2002, the company released the critically-acclaimed first-run film *Murderous Maids*, the chilling true story of two homicidal sisters, starring Sylvie Testud. Rialto’s 2004 slate included the original 1954 Japanese version of Ishiro Honda’s *Godzilla*, never before released in the U.S.; Peter Davis’s Oscar-winning 1974 documentary *Hearts and Minds*; and Gillo Pontecorvo’s groundbreaking *The Battle of Algiers*, which became one of last year’s top-grossing foreign films. Currently in release are Godard’s *Masculine Feminine*, Claude Berri’s *The Two of Us*, Louis Malle’s *Elevator to the Gallows*, and Bresson’s *Mouchette*.

In 1999 Rialto received a special Heritage Award from the National Society of Film Critics, and in 2000 received a special award from the New York Film Critics Circle, presented to Goldstein and Halpern by Jeanne Moreau. The two co-presidents have each received the French Order of Chevalier of Arts and Letters.

Among the company’s 2006 releases will be Carol Reed’s *Fallen Idol*, starring Ralph Richardson, based on a story by Graham Greene; and *Army of Shadows*, Jean-Pierre Melville’s epic of the French Resistance era, starring Lino Ventura and Simone Signoret. Shown to wide acclaim at this year’s Telluride Film Festival, Melville’s film has never before been released in the U.S.

Pressbook edited and annotated by Bruce Goldstein and Adrienne Halpern  
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