

**JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE' S**

**LÉON MORIN, PRIEST**

**RIALTO PICTURES PRESS BOOK**

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# LÉON MORIN, PRIEST

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Director

**Jean-Pierre Melville**

Screenplay

**Jean-Pierre Melville**

Based on on the novel by

**Béatrix Beck**

Producers

**Georges de Beauregard**

**Carlo Ponti**

Cinematography

**Henri Decaë**

Editors

**Jacqueline Meppiel**

**Nadine Trintignant**

**Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte**

Music

**Martial Solal**

**Albert Raisner (harmonica)**

Assistant Directors

**Luc Andrieux, Volker Schlöndorff, Jacqueline Parey**

**A French – Italian co-production**

**Produced by Rome Paris Films – Concordia Compagnia Cinematografica**

**First released on September 22, 1961**

**A RIALTO PICTURES RELEASE**

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**France, 1961 running time: 117 min.  
aspect ratio: 1.66:1 In French with English subtitles**

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## CAST

Barny  
**Emmanuelle Riva**

Léon Morin  
**Jean-Paul Belmondo**

Christine  
**Irène Tunc**

Sabine  
**Nicole Mirel**

Lucienne  
**Gisèle Grimm**

Arlette  
**Monique Hennessy**

France  
**Chantal, Marielle & Patricia Gozzi (alternating)**

GIs  
**Cedric Grant & George Lambert**

Edelman  
**Marco Behar**

Günther  
**Gérard Buhr**

German Officer  
**Howard Vernon**

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## SYNOPSIS

In a small French provincial town during the Occupation, Barny (Emmanuele Riva) is a young widow who works grading papers for a correspondence school that has been evacuated from Paris. Italian *Bersaglieri* (noted for their feathered hats) and a German marching band parade through the town, and in a manless world, Barny nurses a crush on Sabine Levy (Nicole Mirel), her supervisor at work (but she protests “You’re mad!” when a co-worker insinuates that Barny really wants to sleep with Sabine). A group of women carefully work out who will be the godparents when they decide to get all their children baptized to conceal possible Jewish or Communist links (Barny’s late husband was Jewish).

Passing St. Bernard’s church, baptized atheist Barny, suddenly irked because the priests “live off our money,” stalks into confession quoting Marx: “Religion is the opiate of the people.” But after the priest, Léon Morin (Jean-Paul Belmondo) startles her by replying “Not exactly,” she finds herself maneuvered into a confession, doing a kneeling penance on the church floor, and coming back two days later to the rectory, where Morin lends her a book.

As deportations begin in the town, Barny’s co-worker Christine Sangredin (Irène Tunc) barks “Yids aren’t French” in hearing range of Professor Edelman (Marco Behar), who returns to the office late at night preparing for flight, disguised completely via a haircut and a shave of his beard. Goaded by Christine’s bitchy behavior, Barny slaps her, to which Christine eventually replies with a kiss. It turns out Morin is her confessor, too; he also puts up Jews on the run and gives them baptismal certificates. Barny’s little daughter France (played, alternately, by sisters Marielle, Chantal, and Patricia Gozzi) is taught about God in school by Morin, and befriends Gunther (Gérard Buhr), a German soldier slated for the Russian front.

In the course of her conversations with Morin, Barny reveals she satisfies herself sexually with a piece of wood, but grudgingly admits that she is starting to believe. And after an epiphany while cleaning out her attic, she announces that “I’m converted”; Morin at first seems almost to talk her out of it, but then takes her first serious confession.

Barny brings Arlette (Monique Hennessy) to see Morin; she pronounces him handsome, which Barny hadn’t realized consciously herself. Christine brings Marion (Monique Bertho), who has five different lovers, to see Morin as well. She tries unsuccessfully to seduce him, then ends up at confession herself.

At a railroad crossing Barny is reprimanded by a German soldier.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The soldier is played by Volker Schlöndorff, Melville’s assistant director on this and other films, who went on to his own distinguished directing career (*The Tin Drum*, etc.)

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And suddenly the town wakes free as the Liberation has come, with confessed Vichy-ite<sup>2</sup> Christine fretting that “I’ll be shot”, and two American G.I.’s escorting Barny and France home.

In their final meetings, Morin talks to Barny about his childhood, rudely brushes past her at Mass, and at last comes to her – but only in a dream. She finally asks him if he would marry her if he were a Protestant (his smiling reply, “Of course”), then asks him if he would marry her if he weren’t a priest, to which he wordlessly sinks an axe into a chopping block and stalks out angrily. After a long interval, he again visits for a complex philosophy discussion and she finally reaches out to him—he springs back and says she must confess this. She does the next day and finds herself at peace. After he announces that he’s leaving on a mission to a remote area, even as she prepares to return to Paris, they have a final meeting.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

After the resounding flop of *Deux Hommes dans Manhattan* in 1959, Jean-Pierre Melville had “had enough of being an *auteur maudit* known only to a handful of crazy film buffs.” Mainstream producers Georges de Beauregard and Carlo Ponti (Sophia Loren’s husband) had asked him to make a film for them, obviously one with a large budget, and with stars. Melville himself selected Béatrix Beck’s autobiographical, Goncourt Prize-winning novel *Léon Morin, Prêtre* (published in English as *The Passionate Heart*<sup>3</sup>), having wanted to film it since its publication in 1952. Melville called it “the most accurate picture I have read of the life of French people under the Occupation,” but he claimed what particularly attracted him was the character of Morin --“Had I been a priest I would have acted as he did”: a striking remark from a Jewish atheist. “Faith, whether in God or Marx, is a thing of the past.”

While Melville was acquainted with Béatrix Beck, he wrote the adaptation himself (though she did watch rushes and liked the finished product) and it is generally faithful, while omitting the principal character’s active work with the Resistance (hiding Jewish children), reprisals against collaborators after the Liberation, the very negative portrait of *both* G.I.’s, and most notably, Morin’s reaction to her question: “Would you marry if you weren’t a priest?” In the book, he says “Yes” before hatcheting the chopping block; in the film he is wordless.

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<sup>2</sup> Vichy in south central France was the headquarters of the regime set up after the German occupation of northern France to administer unoccupied France and the French colonies, but was considered by the Allies to be a puppet of the Nazis.

<sup>3</sup> The English title given for the film’s (extremely limited) original U.S. release was *The Forbidden Sinner*.

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The star casting was of course pivotal. For Melville, the principal character “Barny” could be nobody else but Emmanuele Riva, then red hot after Alain Resnais’ *Hiroshima mon amour*—he wanted someone who resembled Béatrix Beck, both physically and emotionally.

Casting Jean-Paul Belmondo was more problematic. He and Melville had met briefly when they passed each other on an Orly airport staircase in Godard’s *Breathless*<sup>4</sup>, but when Melville met him on the Italian locations of De Sica’s *Two Women*, in which Belmondo was appearing opposite Loren, the actor was extremely reluctant if not hostile—he was already a New Wave icon, with his star persona already established as ironical and anti-establishment. But his eventual agreement proved a wise career move.

Other members of the cast included Irène Tunc, Miss France of 1954, although by then a busy actress as well; Patricia Gozzi, later the star of *Sundays and Cybèle* and *Rapture*, and her two sisters alternating as Barny’s daughter; and Melville’s blonde secretary Monique Hennessy, later the same year to be the abused object of perhaps Melville’s most misogynistic scene: the moll who’s brutally beaten and then drenched with water by Belmondo in *Le Doulos*.

Location shooting was at Grenoble, and at Montfort L’Amaury near Paris (the eagle-eyed will note an occasional bystander looking at the camera); indoor shooting was at Melville’s own Studio Jenner, where he could use subtle crane shots on Morin’s staircase. A certain Father Lepoutre was Melville’s consultant on all things Catholic (the Church originally kept its distance, but embraced the film on its release).

The present version was ruthlessly cut from a three hour, thirteen-minute original, but in a situation perhaps unique in film history: by the director himself, over the original protests of the distributor and producers. After Melville realized, while creating a kind of epic of the Occupation, that the Barny/Morin relationship was the only aspect that still interested him, he had to appeal to Ponti as the author of the film to make the cuts. (The length of the original version is all the more remarkable in that the book is less than 200 pages and can be read in an afternoon.)

On release, *Léon Morin, Priest* was Melville’s greatest hit to date; it divided the French critics on ideological lines, the right praising, the left panning, with the critic of a satirical magazine commenting, “It won’t make me go to Mass, but I like this film.”

This was Melville’s decisive turn to the mainstream, if still personal cinema, and began his alienation from those critics who had hailed him as a precursor of the Nouvelle Vague.

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<sup>4</sup> Melville had a famous cameo in Godard’s feature debut; see page 13.

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## MELVILLE ON *LÉON MORIN, PRIEST* (interview with Rui Nogueira, 1970)

### ***How did you come to make Léon Morin, Priest?***

The failure of *Deux Hommes dans Manhattan* didn't cause me any problems. My career wasn't at stake and it wasn't a breakdown. On the contrary, I owned my own studios, and was more or less immune. But I had no intention of going on making unsuccessful films. I'd had enough of being an *auteur maudit* known only to a handful of crazy film buffs.

... In September 1960, I bought the rights to an American thriller which I wanted to film and which I proposed to the most powerful French producer-distributor, Edmond Tenoudji. He suggested that I should become a "jobbing" producer for him, using as director a young man who was very much in vogue that September but isn't any longer. But I couldn't set it up, and as Georges de Beauregard and Carlo Ponti wanted me to make a film for them, I finally decided to adapt *Léon Morin, Priest*.

### ***Does Béatrix Beck's novel correspond to the war as you knew it?***

It corresponds to much of my experience, not necessarily to my war... France under the Occupation, for instance. But what attracted me to this book, which I had wanted to film ever since it was published in November 1952, was the character of Léon Morin, because I believe that this non-autobiographical way of revealing oneself is peculiar to all creators, and had I been a priest I would have acted as he did.

I think I reveal myself enormously through my films. In each of his ventures a filmmaker must be able to disguise himself in a costume tailored to his material. I often say that if I were making a film about black Africa, I'd become a black African while shooting the film; if I were making a film about the Indian minorities of North America, I'd become a Sioux or an Apache during shooting; in a film about homosexuals, I would be a homosexual, and so on. Do you see what I mean? I would think exactly like the character I was dealing with.

### ***This is the first of three films you made in a row with Belmondo. How did you meet him?***

The very first time I met Belmondo was in the scene in *Breathless* where he is coming down the stairs at Orly, facing the camera, and I am going up the same stairs with my back to the camera. All we did was pass each other. He had just finished his part, and I was just beginning mine.

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My first real meeting with him was in Italy while he was making De Sica's *Two Women* with Sophia Loren. Carlo Ponti had invited me to spend the weekend with him so that I could talk to Belmondo about my intention of using him in *Léon Morin*. Belmondo was very reticent about the project, not to say completely hostile, simply because he was afraid.

We met on the locations where *Two Women* was being shot, between Naples and Rome, in a spot where I had served during the war. But the astonishing thing was that the film he was making told a story about us, about French soldiers, but represented as Moroccan troops in De Sica's film. Actually, the men who committed those rapes in Italy were not Moroccans, who would have been incapable of such acts, but French soldiers. It had quite an effect on me, suddenly finding myself back there.

## ***And why did you choose Emmanuelle Riva to play Barny?***

No one but she could play Béatrix Beck. I knew Béatrix Beck, so I had to find someone who resembled her, who was like her, and I must say I'm very happy with my choice. I don't see who else I could have used instead. I had seen Emmanuelle Riva in *Hiroshima mon Amour* and liked her very much. She isn't at all easy to direct because she's terribly nervous, but she is a great actress. I think she's fantastic in *Léon Morin*.

## ***What about the rest of the cast? How did you choose them?***

I chose Irène Tunc because she incarnated the mental image I had of Christine Sangredin...she had the Lyonnais accent, she was beautiful...There are three Gozzi sisters in *Léon Morin*. In one amusing shot the character of France is played simultaneously by two of them. It's a trick shot: as Marielle turned her head to the left, I replaced her with Patricia, who then completed the movement begun by her younger sister. So in one shot I show the baby grown into a little girl; but people don't notice because it is Marielle's voice in both halves of the sentence spoken by France over the shot. There are always a lot of things in my films which are designed not to be noticed.

As for Monique Hennessy, who plays the part of Arlette, she was my secretary and I had already used her in *Deux Hommes dans Manhattan*, where she plays the prostitute who says, "So kind of you to visit me. Tell me, pretty boys, are you in a hurry or not?" I used her again in *Le Doulos*, where she is murdered by Belmondo. Monique might have gone places. I have known so many girls who might have gone places!

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***What was the main idea in Léon Morin, Priest? The impossibility of conversion?***

No, that was only one element. Conversion doesn't take up a man's whole life, only a moment in it. The main idea was to show this amorous priest who likes to excite girls but doesn't sleep with them. Morin is Don Juan; he has the women all crazy about him. Well aware of his physical attraction and his intelligence, he makes maximum use of these assets.

***Are you also denouncing mysticism as an imposture?***

Ah, no, I don't want to talk about things like that. Personally I have no idea whether mysticism is an imposture. Everyone has the right to be what he is and to believe what he likes. In any case I don't think *Léon Morin* is an anti-religious film or that it can be taken as such. On the contrary, I believe it's a very Catholic film. So did the French Catholic Church, since it adopted the film after it was finished. Before, the Church was very, very prudent, even a little "anti," because it gave me no help during shooting.

You know, I believe that personal opinions have nothing to do with cinematographic problems. What I think of faith, of the non-existence of God, of Socialism and so on, is my private world, a world which I try not to put into my films because I don't think it's my business to offer messages – political, metaphysical or whatever. It may be the business of other filmmakers to discuss the big questions, but, personally, though I don't mind touching on them, I have no wish to explore them.

***But you aren't a religious person, are you?***

No, definitely not.

***Then what do you understand by religion and faith?***

I'll answer that from a personal point of view, nothing to do with the film. I think that religion is useful if one considers it as a moral foundation. As a matter of fact, it has been useful...because there was a religious morality before there were civic or lay moralities. Faith is something that eludes me because I can't conceive of believing in something that doesn't exist. I don't understand how people can believe in God any more than in Santa Claus. Why do people tell children that Santa Claus doesn't exist, and never tell adults that God doesn't exist? They seem to let this other legendary character go on forever. To me they are two brothers. God and Santa Claus. They exist only in the minds of children and child-adults. Nevertheless, I do know some very intelligent men who believe in God, so I really can't go so far as to say that people who believe in God are fools. All the same it's amazing. It's quite beyond me.

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For me faith, whether in God or Marx, is a thing of the past.

## ***Is Barney's conversion in Léon Morin, Priest a false conversion?***

Of course. She becomes converted in order to get laid. But she isn't aware of this. She really believes in her conversion. She has come close to the priest, to his thoughts, but suddenly this isn't enough. She must make love with the agent of God.

## ***Do you see Morin as a militant priest without frustrations?***

Come now! A priest is always frustrated. Look at how the only people asking to be allowed to marry at the moment are the priests. No one wants to get married any more except them. In any case Léon Morin is a man, and men need to make themselves suffer... being a priest is a way of making oneself suffer.

## ***Is it true that Léon Morin, Priest originally ran for over three hours?***

Yes, it ran for three hours and thirteen minutes, and I cut it down to two hours and eight. Both distributor and producers were very pleased with the film in the full version, and even tried to prevent me from cutting it. I had to appeal to Carlo Ponti, and he gave me a free hand because I was the author of the film. I had created a sort of great fresco of the Occupation, of the obsession with food, of all the things, including sex, that obsess a woman on her own. Then suddenly the only aspect that continued to interest me was this story of an unfulfilled love affair between Morin and Barney. Originally, Léon Morin made his appearance only after an hour and a quarter; in the final version he appears after a quarter of an hour. Nevertheless, the film was good, and I wonder now whether I was maybe wrong to cut it...or maybe I was right, I don't know.

I cut an excellent scene in which Barney begged Morin to let her warn the young girl accused of fraternizing with the Germans, Gilberte Lathuile, that she was going to be shot by the Maquisards. It was extraordinary because of the priest's attitude, and Jean-Paul was first rate in it. The trouble was it was dependent on the stuff I had cut.

## ***What about the scene in the book where Barney finds Lucienne crying over an open book, and realizes that it is a cookery book and not a novel which has moved her to tears?***

I did shoot that...it was a marvelous scene. It's a wonderful book! I often re-read it, you know. On the other hand, I didn't shoot the scene where Christine describes the terrible death of a child who is killed by an Italian soldier. I like Italians, and I didn't want to show them in an unsympathetic light.

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***Did you shoot other scenes which you didn't retain in the final cut?***

I didn't keep the scenes dealing with the Maquis and their activities, the scenes with Anton and Minna Silmann; or the sequence where Barny and Christine are playing at bullfights and where Irène Tunc took off her blouse and had nothing on underneath.

A scene I didn't shoot was the one in which Barny, in trousers, tries to seduce Léon in his soutane. I didn't want to spoil the vertical pan in *Army of Shadows* which shows a girl in trousers kissing a Scottish soldier in a kilt. I had to choose...

***The relationships between the female characters are rather equivocal.***

They're not equivocal, they're very clear. I love the way Barny describes Sabine Levy, with whom she is in love, "She's like an Amazon... Pallas ... a Samurai."

***You had several editors on the film, among them Nadine Marquand, who has since become a director.***

Yes, Denise de Casabianca, Nadine Marquand, Jacqueline Meppiel, Marie-Josephe Yoyotte and Agnes Guillemot. I didn't list them all on the credits because Casabianca and Guillemot worked very little on the film. But I listed the other three in order of preference. They then all banded together to sue Georges de Beauregard. I went along to plead my own case and obtained a decision from the court which is now law in France, whereby it is the director who establishes the credits. And the title card on which they were listed in order of preference remained in the film.

Do you know how I met Marie-Josephe Yoyotte? One day Cocteau telephoned me to say, "I'm sending you a girl called Marie-Josephe Yoyotte. I think she could play Dargelos in *Les Enfants Terribles*." As soon as I had met her I phoned Cocteau to ask, "Are you crazy?" Yes," he said. "Maybe!"

**- excerpted from *MELVILLE* by Rui Nogueira (The Viking Press, 1971)**

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## JEAN-PIERRE MELVILLE (Director/Screenwriter)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## JEAN-PAUL BELMONDO (Léon Morin)

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). 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 Melville's *Léon Morin, Priest* and *Le Doulos* (both 1961 and Rialto Pictures re-releases), 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. Last year he made a poignant but commercially ill-advised comeback in *A Man and His Dog*, Francis Huster's remake of Vittorio de Sica's *Umberto D.*

## EMMANUELLE RIVA (Barney)

Born 1927 in Cheniméni, Riva worked as a seamstress before beginning to appear on the Paris stage. Her first film was an uncredited role as a secretary in *Les Grande familles* (1958), but she became world famous after her third film, Resnais' *Hiroshima mon amour*, in 1959. After *Léon Morin, Priest*, she starred for Georges Franju in the title role of *Thérèse Desqueyroux* (Best Actress, Venice Film Festival) and also appeared in his *Thomas l'imposteur*, from the Cocteau novel. In later years, she appeared in *Venus Beauty Institute* and as Juliette Binoche's mother in Kieslowski's *Blue*. Renowned for her distinctive voice—featured in voice-over in *Léon Morin, Priest*—both cultivated and hesitant; she was briefly a major star of the New Wave, epitomizing, with Jeanne Moreau, a new kind of female star, more realistic and intellectual as opposed to the “sex kitten” stereotype of the Martine Carol/Bardot tradition.

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## BÉATRIX BECK (Novel)

Born in 1914 in Switzerland to Belgian parents, Beck received a law degree in France and became a Communist activist, marrying a stateless Jew in 1936. They had a daughter together before he was arrested by the Vichy government; he died in a concentration camp. After experiences during the Occupation paralleling that of Barny in *Léon Morin, Priest*, she published her first novel in 1948 and became André Gide's secretary. Her autobiographical third novel, *Léon Morin, prêtre*, won the Goncourt Prize in 1952. The prize money went for an apartment in Jean-Paul Sartre's building. In 1966, she began a North American teaching career, at Berkeley, the University of Virginia and in Canada. She continued to win prizes and published over a dozen more novels before her death in 2008.

## MARTIAL SOLAL (Music)

Born 1927 in Algiers, Solal began piano studies at the age of six, taught by his mother; his father was an opera singer. Moving to Paris in 1950 he began working with the legendary Django Reinhardt and U.S. expatriates Sidney Bechet and Don Byas, first recording in 1953, and forming his own quartet in the late 50s. In 1963 he made his first, acclaimed appearance at the Newport Jazz Festival.

Solal wrote his first film score in 1959 for Melville's *Two Men in Manhattan*, and, over the next eighteen years, would write music for sixteen more movies, including Cocteau's *Testament of Orpheus*, Melville's *Léon Morin, Priest*, and Marcel Carné's *Trois chambres à Manhattan*. But the most iconic of Solal's scores is undoubtedly the seemingly improvised jazz music he wrote for Godard's *Breathless*. Curiously, Solal has only written two more film scores since 1967.

## HENRI DECAË (Cinematographer)

Born outside Paris in 1915, Decaë had a camera at early age and was making amateur movies in his teens. He studied at one of France's first film schools and directed, photographed and edited documentary and industrial shorts and publicity films before, during and after the war. His first feature was also Melville's debut, *Le Silence de la Mer* (1947); shot on the proverbial shoestring, this was the first of seven collaborations with Melville (the others were *Les Enfants Terribles*, *Bob Le Flambeur*, *L'Ainé des Ferchaux*, *Le Samourai*, and *Le Cercle Rouge*). In a heady two-year period, Decaë shot the films debuts of Louis Malle (*Elevator to the Gallows*, 1957), Claude Chabrol (*Le Beau Serge*, 1958), and François Truffaut (*The 400 Blows*, 1958), cementing his stature as the other cinematographer – his technical mastery and pictorial perfectionism as opposed to Raoul Coutard's grittier documentary style—of the New Wave. Through the 60s he would work four more

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times with Malle and three with Chabrol, as well as three films (most notably, *Purple Noon*), with René Clément, erstwhile Truffaut's critical target as part of the decried "Cinema of Quality." Other notable art house credits of the 60s include Serge Bourguignon's *Sundays and Cybèle* and Joseph Losey's *Eva* (both 1962).

Decaë went international as early as 1966, with Peter Glenville's *Hotel Paradiso*, soon followed by Anatole Litvak's *The Night of the Generals* and Glenville's *The Comedians*, from Graham Greene. While making multiple films with French box office favorites Gérard Oury, Henri Verneuil, Claude Zidi and Georges Lautner, he would work, in Europe, with Hollywood names Sidney Pollack (*Castle Keep*, 1967, and *Bobby Deerfield*, 1977), George Stevens (*The Only Game in Town*, 1968), Robert Wise (*Two People*, 1972), Franklin J. Schaffner (*The Boys from Brazil*, 1978), and Michael Ritchie (*An Almost Perfect Affair*, 1979, and *The Island*, 1980, in which he memorably recreated the look of illustrations by N.C. Wyeth). Curiously, in spite of his obvious eminence, he never received a major award for cinematography.

Decaë died in 1987.

## 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*, *Masculine Feminine* 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*, for the first time in its uncut European version.

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 celebrated a record-breaking 2004 with the previously unreleased, original 1954 Japanese version of *Godzilla*; Peter Davis's Oscar-winning documentary *Hearts and Minds*; and Pontecorvo's groundbreaking *The Battle of Algiers*, one of 2004's top-grossing foreign films.

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In 2006, Rialto released Melville's 1969 epic masterpiece *Army of Shadows* for the very first time in the U.S. *Army of Shadows* became the most critically acclaimed film of the year, topping many Ten Best lists, including those in *The New York Times* and *Premiere*, and was named Best Foreign Film of 2006 by the New York Film Critics' Circle, in addition to receiving special awards from both the Los Angeles and National Society of Film Critics.

Rialto's re-release of Alberto Lattuada's *Mafioso*, a dark comedy starring Alberto Sordi, was the unqualified highlight of the 2006 New York Film Festival. 2007 re-releases also included Melville's *Le Doulos*, starring Jean-Paul Belmondo, and Jean-Jacques Beineix's "second wave" thriller *Diva*.

In 2008, the company had phenomenal success with Alain Resnais's 1962 arthouse classic *Last Year at Marienbad*. Rialto has also released Robert Hamer's rediscovered masterwork of "Brit Noir," *It Always Rains on Sunday* and undertook their second hit reissue of Godard's *Contempt*. Another successful re-release was Max Ophüls' legendary film *Lola Montès* in a definitive new 35mm restoration, which was showcased to enormous acclaim at the Cannes and Telluride Film Festivals and was the spotlight retrospective of the 2008 New York Film Festival.

Rialto's most recent releases have been the U.S. premiere of Godard's *Made in U.S.A.*, and the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary re-release of Costa-Gavras' Academy Award-winning political thriller *Z*, starring Yves Montand and Jean-Louis Trintignant. Later this spring, Rialto will re-release John Boulting's *Brighton Rock* (1947), a British Film Noir masterpiece starring Richard Attenborough and based on the novel by Graham Greene, opening at New York's Film Forum on June 19.

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 Critic's 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.

2007 marked Rialto's tenth anniversary, a milestone that was celebrated with a retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Similar tributes were held at George Eastman House in Rochester, New York; the AFI Silver Theater in Washington, D.C.; and the SIFF Theater in Seattle.

This coming May, the San Francisco International Film Festival will present Goldstein with its prestigious Mel Novikoff Award. For information, go to [sffs.org](http://sffs.org).

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## RIALTO PICTURES RELEASES

- 2009           MADE IN USA (U.S. premiere)  
Z  
LEON MORIN, PRIEST  
BRIGHTON ROCK [June]
- 2008           LAST YEAR AT MARIENBAD  
IT ALWAYS RAINS ON SUNDAY  
CONTEMPT  
LOLA MONTES
- 2007           MAFIOSO  
LE DOULOS  
DIVA
- 2006           ARMY OF SHADOWS  
THE FALLEN IDOL  
FANFAN LA TULIPE  
TWO OR THREE THINGS I KNOW ABOUT HER
- 2005           MASCULINE FEMININE  
ELEVATOR TO THE GALLOWS  
THE TWO OF US  
CLASSE TOUS RISQUES  
MOUCHETTE
- 2004           THE BATTLE OF ALGIERS  
GODZILLA (U.S. premiere of uncut Japanese version)  
HEARTS AND MINDS
- 2003           LE CERCLE ROUGE (U.S. premiere of uncut version)  
A WOMAN IS A WOMAN  
TOUCHEZ PAS AU GRISBI  
AU HASARD BALTHAZAR  
EYES WITHOUT A FACE  
THE MILKY WAY
- 2002           PEPE LE MOKO  
MURDEROUS MAIDS  
QUAI DES ORFEVRES  
UMBERTO D.  
THE PRODUCERS  
THE PHANTOM OF LIBERTY

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2001

BAND OF OUTSIDERS  
BOB LE FLAMBEUR  
THAT OBSCURE OBJECT OF DESIRE  
JULIET OF THE SPIRITS

2000

RIFIPI  
THE DISCREET CHARM OF THE BOURGEOISIE  
DIARY OF A CHAMBERMAID  
BILLY LIAR

1999

THE THIRD MAN  
GRAND ILLUSION  
PEEPING TOM

1998

NIGHTS OF CABIRIA  
GREY GARDENS

1997

CONTEMPT  
THE GRADUATE

**“TEN YEARS OF RIALTO PICTURES”  
DVD BOX SET RELEASED BY CRITERION**

In honor of the company's anniversary, The Criterion Collection has issued a special gift box set containing ten films displaying the breadth of Rialto's collection, including *Army of Shadows*, *Au Hasard Balthazar*, *Band of Outsiders*, *Billy Liar*, *Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie*, *Mafioso*, *Murderous Maids*, *Rififi*, *The Third Man*, and *Touchez pas au Grisbi*.

**Press contact (Rialto box set only): Brian Carmody, (212) 685-4144**

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Edited & annotated by Bruce Goldstein & Adrienne Halpern  
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