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## Jacques Audiard & The French Thriller - January 2010



It may be said that the crime genre is in **Jacques Audiard's** genes: his father was the celebrated and hugely prolific screenwriter and director **Michel Audiard** and, together with the original masters **Jean-Pierre Melville**, **Claude Chabrol** and **Henri-Georges Clouzot**, he is among the few French filmmakers to create something entirely their own from the generic material of the crime story. Throughout January **BFI Southbank** will examine this when we screen all of Jacques Audiard's films, including a preview of *A Prophet* (*Un Prophète*, 2009) which won **Grand Prize of the Jury** at **Cannes** and **Best Film Award** at the **London Film Festival**. To complement his work we will present a season of classic French thrillers, including *La Bête humaine* (1938), *Finally Sunday!* (*Vivement Dimanche!*, 1983) and *Harry, He's Here to Help* (*Harry, un ami qui vous veut du bien*, 2000).

It was clear, however, from Jacques Audiard's directorial debut *See How They Fall* (*Regarde les hommes tomber*, 1994) that he was never likely to be 'merely' a thriller director. His films focus not simply on stories of criminality, but on the theme of social exclusion, on individuals vying to survive in hostile environments – whether jail, office or society at large. And invariably, they find themselves matching society's amorality with their own. Audiard's protagonists – usually men, with the distinctive exception of *Read My Lips* (*Sur mes lèvres*, 2001) – are never conventionally sympathetic, and indeed can be disconcertingly abrasive. But in the manoeuvres they undertake to salvage something of their own identity in a world defined by lies and oppressions, particularly in *A Self-Made Hero* (*Un Héros très discret*, 1996), they at once embody a parodic version of conventional morality and offer a heroic (or rather anti-heroic) form of resistance.

In particular, Audiard focuses on masculinity and its fault lines, often depicting flawed father-son relations, both literal, *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* (*De battre mon cœur s'est arrêté*, 2005), and figurative, *See How They Fall*. The story is told again in Audiard's superb new film *A Prophet*, which tells of a brutal apprenticeship within prison walls.

Writing with such collaborators as **Alain Le Henry** and **Tonino Benacquista**, Audiard has created a detached yet entirely personal voice, his primarily realistic directing style often displaying a discreet but complex stylisation (as witness his work with the minutiae of sound in *Read My Lips*). He is also one of France's finest directors of actors, working with the likes of **Romain Duris**, **Emmanuelle Devos**, **Vincent Cassel** and **Mathieu Kassovitz** to develop densely nuanced creations: characters that you probably wouldn't want to meet in real life but who, once encountered on screen, aren't quickly forgotten.

### Preview: *A Prophet Un Prophète*

In this spare, red-blooded prison drama, compelling newcomer Tahar Rahim is Malik, a young man whose hard-won ascent through the behind-bars crime system begins when he gets involved with the ruling Corsican gang. Despite elements of action thriller and eerie surrealism, this is essentially an essay in hard realism, offering a steely take on

racial tensions in contemporary France. Without a doubt, one of the hardest hitting French films of recent years, previewed here (on the heels of its **Best Film Award** at the **London Film Festival**) as a highlight of our season devoted to the work of Jacques Audiard, an innovative master of the contemporary French thriller genre.

France 2009 Dir Jacques Audiard With Tahar Rahim, Niels Arestrup, Adel Bencherif 150min EST

Courtesy of Optimum Releasing

**Wed 13 Jan 18:00 NFT1** Tickets £12.90, concs £9.65 (Members pay £1.40 less)

## The French Thriller

Jacques Audiard's highly stylish variations on the crime movie are in keeping with a long, distinguished French tradition of major auteurs working in that genre. Vivid characterisation, taut plotting, a strong sense of social milieu and a fascination with the ethics of trust and betrayal have meant that directors as different as **Jean Renoir** and **Henri-Georges Clouzot**, **Jean-Pierre Melville** and **Claude Chabrol** have produced more than their fair share of landmark movies. And the tradition is far from dead; Audiard is not alone in making superior crime fare, as is made gloriously clear by the films made by **Cédric Kahn**, **Dominik Moll** and **Bertrand Tavernier** selected for this brief but surprisingly diverse survey of crime classics.



### PRESS CONTACT

Katie Gilbert - Tel: 020 7957 8919 or email: [katie.gilbert@bfi.org.uk](mailto:katie.gilbert@bfi.org.uk)

#### *Deadly Pursuit Mortelle randonnée*

Audiard *père et fils* collaborated on this stylish adaptation of Marc Behm's revered existential thriller *The Eye of the Beholder*, about an investigator – the 'Eye' (Serrault) – attempting to track down an elusive and uncannily protean female killer. Isabelle Adjani is at her most enigmatic and perverse, the film is steeped in eerie and distinctly Freudian ambience, and Carla Bley's score makes this a very distinctive pleasure indeed.

France 1983 Dir Claude Miller With Michel Serrault, Isabelle Adjani 120min EST

**Tue 5 Jan 20:40 NFT2, Mon 11 Jan 20:30 NFT3**

#### *Angel Dust Poussière d'ange*

Co-scripted by Audiard and Alain Le Henry, *Angel Dust* is a superior example of the strain of elegant, glossily-lit French thrillers that burgeoned in the wake of *Diva* and the *cinéma du look*. Sleek and tough in equal measure, with a distinctive other-worldly edge, this applies Audiard's characteristic narrative complexity to the story of a cop on the skids (inimitably grizzled Giraudeau) and an enigmatic waif *fatale* (Bastien).

France 1987 Dir Edouard Niermans With Bernard Giraudeau, Fanny Bastien 95min EST 15

**Thu 7 Jan 20:40 NFT2, Fri 15 Jan 18:30 NFT2**

#### *See How They Fall Regarde les hommes tomber*

Audiard's first film as director is also his darkest, and his most narratively devious. A double time-scheme begins with a killing, then leaps back to introduce an outsider duo (Trintignant, Kassovitz) whose relationship recalls *Of Mice and Men*. In parallel, salesman Simon (Yanne) begins a murder investigation that leads him down the path of solitude and obsession. Set in a shabby *noir* netherworld, the film is a compelling study of male need and exploitation.

France 1994 With Jean-Louis Trintignant, Mathieu Kassovitz, Jean Yanne 100min EST

**Fri 8 Jan 18:10 NFT3, Sat 16 Jan 20:40 NFT2**

#### *A Self-Made Hero Un Héros très discret*

This picaresque comedy savagely tilts at French pieties about heroism and the Resistance. Albert Dehousse is a man of little distinction who, after World War Two, contrives to persuade the world of his illustrious role in the Resistance. Framed as a mockdocumentary – with musical interludes – this is Audiard's most playful film, with Kassovitz excelling as the morally murky yet oddly touching anti-hero.

France 1996 With Mathieu Kassovitz, Anouk Grinberg, Sandrine Kiberlain 106min EST 15

**Sat 9 Jan 18:10 NFT2, Fri 15 Jan 20:40 NFT2**

#### *Read My Lips Sur mes lèvres*

Arguably the closest Audiard has come to making a straight thriller, *Read My Lips* is also a subtly unconventional anti-romance, and the director's only film to date from a female point of view. Emmanuelle Devos is superb as Carla, a deaf office worker whose life changes when she finds a protégé, and protector, in ex-prisoner Paul (Cassel), who introduces her to an off-limits world of brutality and crime.

France 2001 With Emmanuelle Devos, Vincent Cassel, Olivier Gourmet 119min EST 15

**Sun 10 Jan 18:00 NFT2, Tue 19 Jan 20:30 NFT2**

## The French Thriller

### ***La Bête humaine***

Renoir made a number of great crime movies, none more gripping than this taut yet tender adaptation of Zola's novel. Jean Gabin and Simone Simon are wonderful as the adulterous lovers, while the railway setting provides, in Renoir's poetic design, an eloquent metaphor for impulses hard to control.

France 1938 Dir Jean Renoir With Fernand Ledoux, Jean Renoir 105min EST

**Mon 25 Jan 20:30 NFT2, Tue 26 Jan 14:30 NFT2, Sat 30 Jan 16:00 NFT2**

### ***Le Jour se lève***

Co-written, like Carné's finest forays into 'poetic realism', by Jacques Prévert, this boasts Gabin on top form as the foundry worker trapped in an attic, surrounded by cops and pondering the series of events that drove him to murder. The superb script is beautifully served by Alexandre Trauner's art direction, Maurice Jaubert's score and an array of exquisite performances.

France 1939 Dir Marcel Carné With Jules Berry, Jacqueline Laurent 91min EST PG

**Fri 1 Jan 16:00 NFT2, Wed 6 Jan 20:45 NFT2, Fri 15 Jan 20:30 NFT3**

### ***Touchez pas au grisbi***

Like Audiard, Becker made a great prison-movie (*Le Trou*), but this earlier gangster saga was still more influential in helping to define the nocturnal ambience and interest in loyalty and betrayal that marked so many French crime films from Melville onwards. Jean Gabin excels as the ageing gang boss planning to retire after one last robbery, as does Lino Ventura as a dangerously ambitious young hood..

France-Italy 1953 Dir Jacques Becker With René Dary, Paul Frankeur 94min EST 15

**Sun 3 Jan 20:30 NFT3, Sun 10 Jan 20:45 NFT3**

### ***Les Diaboliques***

French cinema's Bible for students of suspense, Clouzot's devious, intensely atmospheric thriller is about two women who conspire to get rid of the overpowering man in both their lives. The anguished aftermath of their deed is traced with a psychological intensity that's not merely Hitchcockian but positively Dostoevskian. Even after five decades, the rule still stands: don't tell your friends the ending.

France 1955 Dir Henri-Georges Clouzot With Simone Signoret, Véra Clouzot, Paul Meurisse 116min EST 15

**Sun 3 Jan 18:00 NFT3, Wed 6 Jan 18:20 NFT2, Sat 9 Jan 20:45 NFT1**

### ***Le Doulos***

Deceit and distrust abound in this dark Parisian thriller, with alleged informant Jean-Paul Belmondo, burglar Serge Reggiani and cop Daniel Crohem all caught up in vengeful treachery. The Americanophile Melville famously based the design of his movie on certain Hollywood classics, but the memorably murky moral universe of the labyrinthine story is entirely his own.

France-Italy 1962 Dir Jean-Pierre Melville With Michel Piccoli 108min EST 12A

**Fri 1 Jan 20:45 NFT3, Wed 6 Jan 14:30 NFT2, Wed 13 Jan 20:50 NFT1**

### ***Une Femme infidèle***

Adapting Hitchcock's concern with complicity and guilt to his own abiding fascination with the discreet crimes of the bourgeoisie, Chabrol here investigates the deadly consequences of a husband's suspicions that his wife is having an affair. The tone, coolly ironic yet surprisingly tender, is characteristic of the writer-director at his best, and he's rewarded by superb performances by Stéphane Audran and Michel Bouquet.

France-Italy 1968 Dir Claude Chabrol With Maurice Ronet 98min EST 15

**Sat 2 Jan 20:40 NFT2, Sun 17 Jan 18:20 NFT2**

### ***Finally, Sunday! Vivement Dimanche!***

Truffaut's swansong was a fresh, delicate grace note. A breezy, sophisticated comedy thriller, it features the director's late-period muse Fanny Ardant as a secretary in an estate agency who turns detective. Based on a Charles Williams novel, *Finally, Sunday* concludes Truffaut's occasional cycle of very personal reworkings of *serie noire* material, and although it's one of his lightest, it's darkly witty and thoroughly entertaining.

France 1983 Dir François Truffaut With Fanny Ardant, Jean-Pierre Trintignant 111min EST PG

**Thu 28 Jan 18:10 NFT3, Sun 31 Jan 20:30 NFT3**

### ***Red Lights Feux rouges***

Based on a Georges Simenon novel, this taut, dryly comic after-hours drama is the best film about the French and their fraught relationship to motoring since Godard's *Weekend*. The peerlessly frazzled-looking Jean-Pierre Darroussin plays a man whose life unravels while on the road with his wife (Bouquet). Tension and social satire merge to mordant effect as Kahn plays havoc with the familiar markers of everyday bourgeois life.

France 2004 Dir Cédric Kahn With Jean- Pierre Darroussin, Carole Bouquet 106min EST 15

**Tue 12 Jan 20:40 NFT3, Sun 17 Jan 20:30 NFT3**

### ***Harry, He's Here to Help Harry, un ami qui vous veut du bien***

Dominik Moll's mischievous, unsettling take on the 'home invasion'/stalker thriller is an object lesson in the perils of keeping up with old acquaintances. Sergi Lopez is chillingly affable as Harry, a man who just wants to do right by his old schoolmate Michel (Lucas), currently French cinema's prime specialist in highly-strung Everyman types out of their depth. Brisk, Hitchcockian and bracingly fiendish.

France 2000 Dir Dominik Moll With Laurent Lucas, Sergi López, Mathilde Seigner 117min EST 15

**Fri 29 Jan 18:20 NFT3, Sat 30 Jan 20:30 NFT3**

***In the Electric Mist***

Tavernier has made marvellous crime films both in France and abroad; this latest, from James Lee Burke's novel, centres on Louisiana cop Dave Robicheaux (Tommy Lee Jones) and a murder investigation that brings him into contact with an alcoholic movie star filming nearby (Peter Sarsgaard) and a murky local Mr Big (John Goodman). A witty, touching and insightful look at violence and justice, loyalty and rivalry, history and memory, boasting a host of great performances from a superb cast. USA-France 2009 Dir Bertrand Tavernier With Kelly Macdonald, Mary Steenburgen, Ned Beatty, Levon Helm 117min  
**Sat 16 Jan 18:30 NFT1, Fri 22 Jan 20:40 NFT1**

**NOTES TO EDITORS:**

**Booking information**

The BFI Southbank is open to all. BFI members are entitled to a discount on all tickets. BFI Southbank Box Office tel: 020 7928 3232. Unless otherwise stated tickets are £9.00, concs £6.65 Members pay £1.40 less on any ticket. Website [www.bfi.org.uk/southbank](http://www.bfi.org.uk/southbank)

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**\*\*\* PICTURE DESK \*\*\***

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