

The Criterion Collection, a continuing series of important classic and contemporary films, presents Henri-Georges Clouzot's



# Le Corbeau (The Raven)

## SPECIAL FEATURES

A mysterious writer of poison-pen letters, known only as Le Corbeau (the Raven), plagues a French provincial town, exposing the collective suspicion and rancor seething beneath the community's calm surface. Made during the Nazi occupation of France, Henri-Georges Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* was attacked by the right-wing Vichy regime, the left-wing Resistance press, and the Catholic Church, and was banned after the liberation. But some—including Jean Cocteau and Jean-Paul Sartre—recognized the powerful subtext of Clouzot's anti-informant, anti-Gestapo fable, and worked to rehabilitate his directorial reputation after the war. *Le Corbeau* brilliantly captures a spirit of paranoid pettiness and self-loathing that turns an occupied French town into a twentieth-century Salem.

- New digital transfer, with restored image and sound
- Video interview with director Bertrand Tavernier (*Coup de Torchon*)
- Excerpts from *The Story of French Cinema by Those Who Made It: Grand Illusions 1939–1942*, a 1975 documentary featuring Henri-Georges Clouzot
- Theatrical trailer
- New and improved English subtitle translation
- Optimal image quality: RSDL dual-layer edition

Plus: a 16-page booklet featuring a new essay by film scholar Alan Williams, author of *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking*, and two articles from a 1947 French newspaper that reveal the scandal and controversy behind “the Corbeau affair”

PIERRE FRESNAY IN LE CORBEAU A FILM BY HENRI-GEORGES CLOUZOT  
WITH GINETTE LECLERC MICHELINE FRANCEY HÉLÉNA MANSON  
JEANNE FUSIER-GIR SYLVIE LILIANE MAIGNÉ  
PIERRE LARQUEY NOËL ROQUEVERT  
ORIGINAL MUSIC BY TONY AUBIN WESTERN ELECTRIC WIDE RANGE  
PRODUCTION DESIGNER ANDRÉ ANDREJEW  
ADAPTATION AND DIALOGUE BY HENRI-GEORGES CLOUZOT  
DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY NICOLAS HAYER SCREENPLAY BY LOUIS CHAVANCE  
DIRECTED BY HENRI-GEORGES CLOUZOT

1943 • 91 minutes • Black & White • Monaural • In French with optional English subtitles • 1.33:1 aspect ratio



JANUS FILMS

STUDIO CANAL



DVD

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Le Corbeau

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Le Corbeau



# CHAPTERS

1. *Logos/Opening credits*
2. *A small town, here or elsewhere...*
3. *"Always squabbling"*
4. *Denise*
5. *The Raven strikes*
6. *The post office*
7. *A web of slander and lies*
8. *Secret meaning*
9. *Dr. Germain, from Grenoble?*
10. *"You're a coward"*
11. *Summoned to the church*
12. *The suicide and funeral of Bed #13*
13. *Mob rule*
14. *"As stupid as that"*
15. *Taking out insurance*
16. *A trap*
17. *Dr. Monatte*
18. *Graphology*
19. *Love and duty*
20. *"So it's you..."*
21. *Ink on the fingers*
22. *The tragedy*
23. *"Then it must be..."*
24. *Color bars*

To switch between the menus and the movie, use the **MENU** key on your remote. Use the **ARROW** keys to cycle through menu selections. Press **ENTER/SELECT** to activate the selection. Color bars are included as the last chapter in order to calibrate the correct brightness of your screen.

# Le Corbeau

For most of its history, French cinema has undergone periodic upheavals characterized by massive changes in many areas— personnel, economics, typical film style and content, and so on. The German occupation resulted in perhaps the most striking of these points of rupture. In personnel, some men and women retired or changed professions rather than work under fascist rule, while many others were cast out because of their “non-Aryan” origins. New people entered the industry or moved up in its hierarchy to fill the void; not surprisingly, they had some of the biggest problems during the “purification” that followed. While most filmmakers accused of collaboration with the enemy escaped with only public reprimands, a few received more extreme sanctions, including being banned from the industry for a period of up to several years. Henri-Georges Clouzot, director of *Le Corbeau*, was one such filmmaker; the occupation brought him a long-term contract as a writer (and later as a writer and director) for Continental-Films, the notorious German-controlled, vertically integrated “major” that was the dominant force in the era’s cinematic production.

Continental’s head, Alfred Greven, seems to have thought of the company as a European version of MGM, with himself as an Aryan version of Louis B. Mayer. Though his brief from propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels ordered him to produce mindless trash for the French public, Greven wanted to make “quality” works of the sort typical of Hollywood studios, including some films of real artistic ambition. One of Continental’s specialties was the detective film, generally with a light, even comic tone. Many of these films starred Pierre Fresnay, the company’s biggest star, who, until *Le Corbeau*, often played detectives whose screen image was close to that of William Powell at MGM. Clouzot’s first film as a director for Continental, *L’Assassin habite au 21* (*The Murderer Lives at Number 21*, 1942), was one of these—a stylish mystery

solved by Fresnay as a police inspector and Suzy Delair as his mistress (a very French variant on the MGM *Thin Man* series’ husband-and-wife team). In this comparatively conventional work, Clouzot already sought to go beyond the superficiality of the studio formula; the film has several disorienting scenes of virtuoso cinematic paranoia. In *Le Corbeau*, he went much further, taking the standard ingredients of the Continental-Films detective movies and using them to make something darker and more complex—to make, in fact, the first classic French *film noir*.

Though the label *film noir* didn’t yet exist (it would be a postwar French invention), *Le Corbeau* is decidedly *noir* in its vision of the world. And though none of the film’s individual stylistic and generic elements was new (most had surfaced in the “poetic realist” films of the late 1930s), Clouzot and screenwriter Louis Chavance’s specific combination of them was.

Much of the film’s style and content will be readily familiar to *noir* lovers everywhere. Though—unlike later examples of the genre—*Le Corbeau* has comparatively few scenes set at night, this doesn’t prevent Clouzot from exploiting hard-edged compositions featuring stark contrasts between light and darkness (the last shot, for example, of the black figure going down the sunny street), dramatically exaggerated shadows (Vorzet’s figure on the stairway wall tips its hat to Germain and says good night), and even, at one dramatic high point, a bare light bulb swinging freely in a dark room—not, however, a police station or a cheap hotel, but a school classroom. Such *noir* elements are coupled in *Le Corbeau* with traits characteristic of works made under the occupation: the small town in the provinces, virtually cut off from the outside and serving as a microcosm of human society; the remarkable passages of subjective sound mixing; striking images of immobility, as when the congregation sits transfixed while a letter drops through a silent church.

Other aspects of the film are not so much specific to either the (nascent) genre nor to the occupation period, but rather to the director’s own ethos. Perhaps the most remarkable of these is

the work's sense of humor, covert though it may be in most instances. Although not calculated to produce outright laughter, amusing moments abound (sometimes bitterly, even despairingly funny ones). Witness Dr. Vorzet's comments on psychiatrists' conventions, or the dictation in the schoolroom (a droll, if rather nasty, parody of one of the mainstays of French educational practice), and, above all, the texts of the anonymous letters that provide the film's mystery plot ("Give my regards to the Eternal Father," ends the one to the dying cancer patient). A major source of humor is the loving attention Clouzot and scriptwriter Chavance give to the French class system. The bourgeoisie (primarily, the doctors) come in for the most ribbing, of course, but the petite bourgeoisie (the hypocritical shopkeeper who won't let her daughter see Dr. Germain) and the lower classes (the worker who doffs his hat at the funeral procession) fare little better.

But probably the most unusual aspect of the film, generically, historically, and in the context of Clouzot's work, is the way in which it stages a properly philosophical debate about the effects of the German occupation. For clearly, as many observers have noted, the anonymous letters that plague the town of St. Robin create a situation much like that of France under the occupation. Dr. Vorzet makes this parallel all but explicit when he speaks of the corruption of moral values brought on by the letters. For example, he says Dr. Germain will spy on his mistress if he gets the chance, and he is almost immediately proved right. But this point of view is only one of two competing ideas in the film about what is happening in the town (and, by extension, in France under the occupation). In opposition to the psychiatrist Vorzet, the brain surgeon Germain says that "sometimes, evil is necessary," and that he, and presumably others in the town, will emerge from the ordeal stronger, even better. He also is proven right when he manages, near the end of the ordeal, to break out of his bitter isolation.

Those who have denounced the film as nihilistic have assumed that it endorses the Vorzet position, conveniently forgetting that the conclusion discredits him completely, even though he

has been telling "the truth" throughout. But Germain fares little better: not only does he succumb to the moral corruption around him, as Vorzet predicted, he also fails to solve the mystery. And so, oddly enough, the film may be read as implicitly rejecting both Germain and Vorzet's views of the letters, and hence the occupation. Instead, *Le Corbeau* puts its faith in women—not all women, by any means, but those who have suffered (like Denise, from her deformity, and the cancer patient's mother, from the death of her son). This is a work, after all, in which the first people we see are old women grieving, and the last image is of the avenging mother walking away down the street. In this respect, too, *Le Corbeau* is very much a film of its time, a period when the very size of women's roles, their symbolic weight, and their moral significance were much greater than they had been before, or would be for some time afterwards. It seems doubtful that Clouzot, the French cinema's great misanthrope, would have consciously held that Suffering Womanhood represented a viable moral or philosophical alternative to the positions of Vorzet and Germain. Probably his covert appeal to women as figures of both knowledge and redemption represented, as it did for so many filmmakers during the occupation, an almost visceral grasping for light in the darkness, and for hope at a time of deepest despair.

—Alan Williams

*Alan Williams is the author of Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking, and is a professor of French at Rutgers University.*



The following two articles appeared in the French newspaper L'Intransigeant in 1947, and represent the two poles of intellectual opinion regarding the fate of Clouzot and his film after the liberation. The first article is by Henri Jeanson, screenwriter of *Pépé le Moko*, and the second is by Joseph Kessel, author of many novels, including *Belle de jour*. These articles appear in René Chateau's book *Jeanson par Jeanson: La Mémoire du Cinéma Français*. Translation by Suzanne Lustgarten and Dorna Khazeni.

## The Return of Clouzot's *Le Corbeau* or The Commies vs. *Le Corbeau*

THE EMPIRE. THE IMPERIAL. CINÉCLUBS.

Louis Chavance, a very fine man, wrote the first draft of *Le Corbeau* well before the war at the time the Tulle letters scandal broke out. How could he have foreseen the controversy that it would give rise to eight or ten years later?

There was in fact "the *Corbeau* affair." Or what could be referred to more correctly as "the Commies vs. *Le Corbeau* affair." We know the first French Amnesty was deeply concerned with moral issues, and that it aspired to unfetter writers from the burdensome shackles of free thought. One and only one indivisible thought for all! To think is to obey. To obey is to keep quiet. Repeat! To live is to pretend to die.

As for the truth, now co-opted and a state-owned monopoly, it was made available upon request to all card-carrying members of the party, by the functionary in charge. There was to be no writing between the lines, nor in the margins. Writing was allowed on the lines only and at the behest of the dictator.

In Moscow, the Gestapo had already compiled the Ottoff list of writers to be eliminated. And thus reactionary works by Messrs. Hemingway, Jean-Paul Sartre, Gide, Malraux, Dos Passos, Breton, Camus, Miller, Léon Blum, Jean Guehenno, known to be lewd vipers and secret agents, were placed on the pyre.

Tell me who you burn and I will tell you who you hate....

This has an oddly familiar ring to it. But getting back to *Le Corbeau*...

If there is one thing that has always struck me as a little shocking in this "Commies vs. *Le Corbeau* affair," it's the bad faith displayed by the

*Corbeau*-phobic crowd. Why is it that they begrudge this film? That it was shot during the occupation and in the name of Continental? Fine. Let's assume this is a valid argument.

But in this case, why make *Le Corbeau* the scapegoat?

Why not condemn *Les Visiteurs du soir*, *Lumière d'été*, and *Le Voyageur de la toussaint* as well?

Were these films by Carné, Grémillon, and Daquin not made with Italian funds?

Based on today's Italian films, I know of course that Italy has always been a stalwart haven of anti-fascism. Never did Italy attempt to usurp the territories of Savoy, Corsica, and Nice. In fact, I know very well that the Italian leather boot hides a velvet foot.

This is not all, however; there's more.

While Leftist papers in Paris were publishing manufactured diatribes by pencil-pushers who raged against Clouzot's film and demanded it stay banned, in cinéclubs across Paris and the provinces the accursed film was shown in packed houses to tens of thousands of spectators. It is common knowledge that cinéclubs were run by, administered, and created by the Communists themselves.

So here's a thought: If, by some terrible chance, *Le Corbeau* were to receive permission to screen commercially, another rare bird of a film would have to be unearthed, and we all know how infrequently rare birds land on the silver screen. If they had the recipe, you better believe they'd have saved it.

What's there left to say? Money talks.

Alas! All good things must come to an end. And so, the opposition's disinterested objections notwithstanding, *Le Corbeau* was released commercially. No longer was it a special at the cinéclubs. Now, anyone could freely listen to this singular bird's caw.

A real five-fingered raven that has not aged and that is still equally cruel. There's no question about it. We find here before us one of the major works of French cinema.

## A COLLECTION OF MONSTERS

It is impossible to remain indifferent to the spectacle of this epidemic of “anonymous letters.” One has to take a stand and be either for or against it. One has to either love it or hate it. Clouzot brutally takes his public to task and forces them to give signs of life. The auditorium is rattled into emotion and reaction. The audience exists. At last, there is someone in the movie theater. They are no longer somnolent, apathetic ghosts.

Yes, the picture presented is drawn in horrible colors.

Yes, the characters are ignoble, their motives sordid, and their morals unconscionable.

Yes, Clouzot and Chavance show us a somber collection of ordinary monsters.

But that is nothing to turn one’s nose up at. The now long-gone scandal of the Tulle letters hails from that lovely age of black markets, of the Exodus, of Mikailovich execution and Peckow’s death sentence, of collective denunciations and organized famine, and overall calamity.

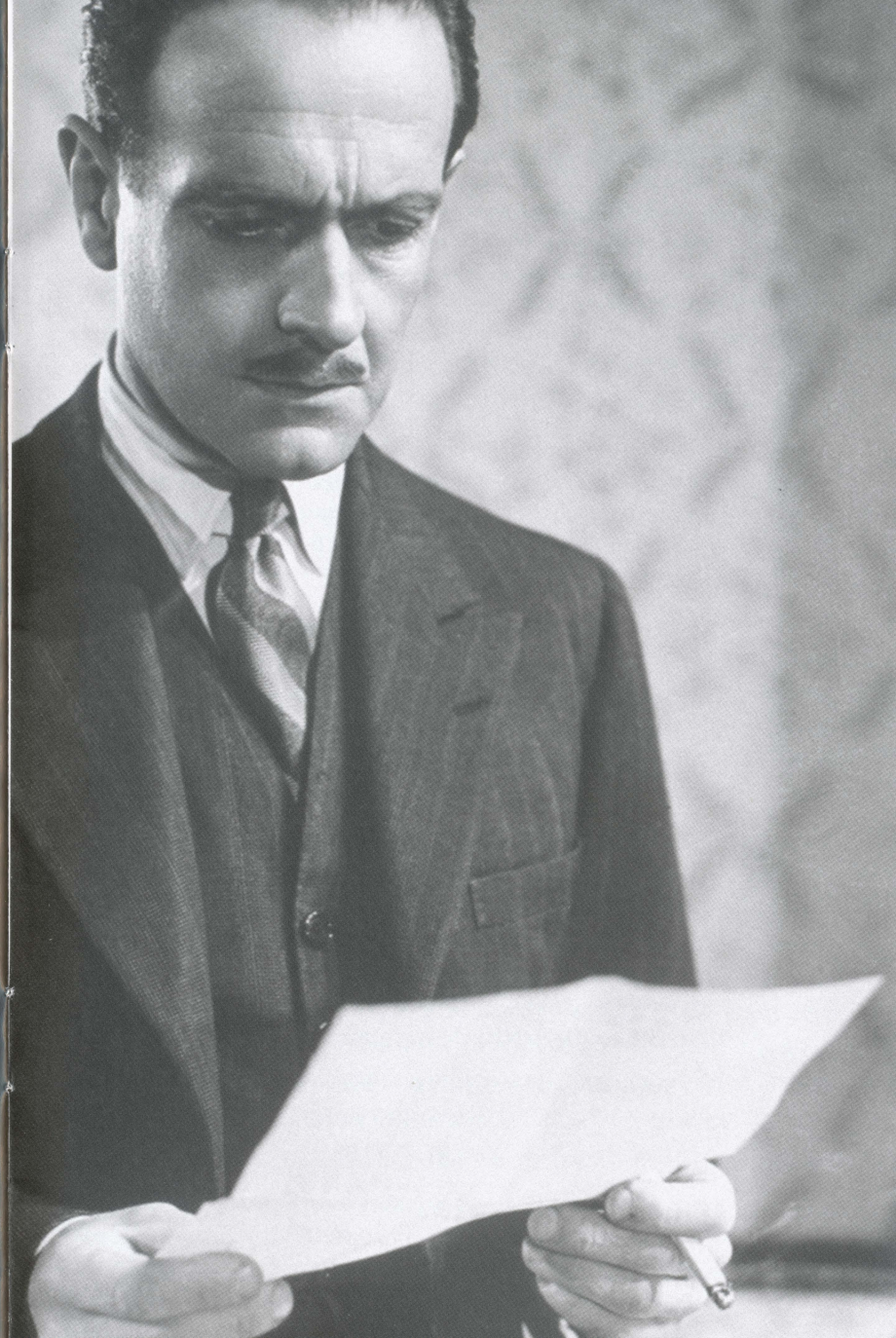
Watching *Le Corbeau* at the Empire Theater, Clouzot’s film is physically repugnant. But compare it to what’s outside, and it begins to taste sweet—the black turns rosy and pale blue.

Almost like a romance novel...

To Clouzot’s credit, he manages to impose a singular acting style. His performers do not look like they were picked at random from here and there, one from the Comédie Française, another from the music hall. Rather, all of them, from the venerable Fresnay to the estimable Pierre Larquey perform for one another. Together they live through the bleak drama. This is what used to be called an ensemble.

But why analyze such a classic film any further? A film whose every sequence is a set-piece: the church scene, the funeral scene, the dictation scene, and all the striking *tête-à-têtes* between Fresnay and Ginette Leclerc. Truly Mr. Clouzot gave others cause for envy. Indeed! Had *Le Corbeau* failed as a film, no one would have demanded that it be banned. Quite the contrary...

—Henri Jeanson, *L’Intransigeant*, September 10, 1947



## *The Corbeau Affair (continued): Joseph Kessel Responds to Henri Jeanson*

*Our good friend and colleague Joseph Kessel disagrees with our film critic Henri Jeanson regarding the film Le Corbeau. As always and in keeping with our code of conduct, L'Intransigeant welcomes the comments of Joseph Kessel, a proud and honorable voluntary soldier in two wars.*

Once again there is a “Clouzot affair.” Though I must admit that this time, he is not to blame. We owe it to certain misguided, well-intentioned souls.

It would seem that the recent screening of *Le Corbeau* in Paris has brought with it an indignant chorus of disapproval in the press and elsewhere decrying the measures taken against the filmmaker after the liberation of France. The filmmaker has been lauded, exalted, and sympathized with as a tender victim.

The choir was large and well-orchestrated. One even found some talented voices there. Alas! I was not moved by it. Because in truth what matters is understanding one another clearly and looking at the simple truth behind the big words and the displays of wit. *Le Corbeau* is an extraordinary film. That is irrefutable. One would have to be blind or deaf to deny the fact. Nonetheless, it was made in the name of Continental, in the course of the war, and during the German occupation.

What this means is:

That Mr. Clouzot was paid by the Germans, at the same time that those Germans were massacring at Oradour, fueling their gas ovens with thousands of French corpses, executing French hostages, ripping open bodies of the French in bloody tombs.

That thanks to German money, Mr. Clouzot was leading a pleasant life while the Germans' actions brought the burdens of misery, shame, and terror to weigh upon France.

And that for and with this money, Mr. Clouzot created what can only be described as a remarkable film. But this film happened to depict a small French town in the most hideous light and as such it offered—

with a French filmmaker as spokesperson—a perfect illustration of the Germans' thesis that France was corrupt.

One will grant me, I hope, the favor of believing that it is not in my intentions to demand that a work of art be “moral.” But in a war for life and for death, it is no longer a question of morality, nor of artistic impartiality, and there is no ivory tower.

In every nation, as in every individual, we encounter the very best and the very worst. In normal times, an author has the right to use these elements as he wishes. In wartime, choosing to show the worst of one's own country, while subsidized by the enemy, is to rejoice in and to serve the intentions of the enemy in the battlefield of psychological warfare.

I would have liked to have seen the faces of Mr. Clouzot's Continental bosses had he set the story of his film, exactly as it was, in a German village.

This is my take on the question of morality in this affair.

Furthermore, I cannot help but think of other directors, older ones than Mr. Clouzot and at the height of their glory, such as William Wyler or Anatole Litvak, who risked their lives in planes and on battlefields, and who sustained lasting wounds. Or of actors such as Claude Dauphin or René Lefèvre, who miraculously escaped the Gestapo, or Robert Lynen, who died tortured by them. All this, while Mr. Clouzot was making *Le Corbeau* in the name of the Germans.

Since the liberation, I have not written even one line calling for punishment. It is up to the governments to make the laws. To the judges to enforce them. It is not my affair. But in order to reassure the misguided well-intentioned souls, let me say, really, Mr. Clouzot is neither a martyr nor a victim. He does not even have cause for indignation. Every opportunity for work, for gain, and for glory, was afforded Mr. Clouzot within a short time span. A span of time that was shorter than the one he spent in the employ of the Germans. A span of time that was far shorter than the one the Germans spent attempting to enslave a country forever.

It is true that, if they had succeeded, it wouldn't have made much difference—for Mr. Clouzot.

—Joseph Kessel, *L'Intransigeant*, September 27, 1947

## CAST

Dr. Remy Germain  
Denise Saillens  
Laura Vorzet  
Dr. Michel Vorzet  
Nurse Marie Corbin  
Rolande Saillens  
School Director Saillens  
Mother

Pierre Fresnay  
Ginette Leclerc  
Micheline Francey  
Pierre Larquey  
Hélène Manson  
Liliane Maigné  
Noël Roquevert  
Sylvie

## ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Le Corbeau is presented in its original theatrical aspect ratio of 1:33:1. On widescreen televisions, black bars will appear on the left and right of the image to maintain the proper screen format. This new digital transfer was created on a Cintel Ursa Diamond Telecine from a 35mm fine-grain master. Thousands of instances of dirt, debris, and scratches were removed using the MTI Digital Restoration System and Discreet's Smoke Systems for finalization. The soundtrack was mastered at 24-bit from a digital monaural mix, and audio restoration tools were used to remove clicks, pops, hiss, and crackle. The Dolby Digital 1.0 signal will be directed to the center channel on 5.1-channel sound systems, but some viewers may prefer to switch to two-channel playback for a wider dispersal of the mono sound.

## SPECIAL THANKS

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## CREDITS

Director	Henri-Georges Clouzot
Director of photography	Nicolas Hayer
Production designer	André Andrejew
Screenplay by	Louis Chavance
Adaptation and dialogue by	Henri-Georges Clouzot and Louis Chavance
Music	Tony Aubin

## DVD PRODUCTION CREDITS

Producer	Issa Clubb
Associate producer	Alexandre Mabilon
Executive producers	Peter Becker, Fumiko Takagi
Technical director	Lee Kline
DVD production supervisor	David Phillips
Art director	Christine Ditrio
Menu and package design	Eric Skillman
Illustrations and hand lettering	Jic Clubb
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Editorial manager	Heather Shaw
Masters and subtitles	Stephanie Friedman
Production manager	Marc Walkow
Audio supervisor	Ken Hansen
Audio production manager	James Forrest
Telecine supervisor	Brigitte Dutray/StudioCanal Image
Telecine colorist	Stéphane Martini/Éclair Laboratoires, Paris
Quality control supervisor	Matt Harris
Quality control/Image restoration	Del Cheetah, Jem Cullen, Alejandro P. Lopez, Maria Palazzola, Stephane Pecharman
DVD mastering	LaserPacific Media Corp., Hollywood
Videographic assistants	Justin Sosnovski, Ian D. Whelan
Editorial assistants	Jason Altman, Andrew Semans

## BERTRAND TAVERNIER INTERVIEW

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Sound	Christophe Raux
Edited by	Issa Clubb