

European 60s

The 400 Blows 1959

(Les Quatre cents coups)

Friday, May 9 - Thursday, May 15, 2008



Film Information

Directed by

François Truffaut

Language

French with English subtitles

Running Time

99 minutes

Film Notes

In 1959, François Truffaut won the award for Best Director at the Cannes Film Festival for his feature-length debut *LES QUATRE CENTS COUPS* (translated, somewhat awkwardly, to *THE 400 BLOWS**). Just the year before, he had been prohibited from even *attending* the festival. It could be said that in that year—in that relatively short stretch of time during which Truffaut went from being a popular outcast to a popular artist, the French New Wave was born.

Truffaut's 1958 ouster from the Cannes Film Festival was the result of both general grievances and a particular offense—in general, his vociferous criticism of the French filmmaking old guard, and in particular an essay he wrote titled (in hilariously direct fashion) "The French Cinema Is Crushed By False Legends." The piece was consistent with the criticism he and others (including Jean-Luc Godard, Claude Chabrol, and Jacques Rivette) were publishing in the now legendary *Cahiers du cinéma*. With *THE 400 BLOWS*, Truffaut created a staggeringly inventive artistic response to the cinema of the time, and, even more impressive, did so through a story that was largely autobiographical. A year later, Godard released his own feature debut, *BREATHLESS*, and any doubts about the emergence of a bold and revolutionary new cinematic movement were

laid to rest. The New Wave was reality.

As chronicled in a recent *New Yorker* article ("Auteur Wars," April 7), Truffaut and Godard shared a fascinatingly tumultuous relationship throughout the years. The attention they earned with their early films yielded drastically different views about what their true roles as filmmakers should be—Truffaut's humanist and romantic nature shining through in his work, and Godard's political, experimental, and often absurdist nature coming through in his. It was a brutal relationship at times, each director attempting to sully the reputation of the other, but neither could ever truly affect the other's indisputable place among cinema's most groundbreaking contributors.

—Casey

*The original title, "Les Quatre cents coups" refers to a French expression meaning, roughly, "to raise hell."



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“I lie now and then, I suppose. Sometimes I’d tell them the truth and they still wouldn’t believe me, so I prefer to lie.”

More Information

Written by

François Truffaut
Marcel Moussy

Featuring

Jean-Pierre Léaud
Claire Maurier
Albert Rémy
Guy Decomble
Georges Flamant

Cinematography by

Henri Decaë

Original Music by

Jean Constantin

Film Editing by

Marie-Josèphe Yoyotte

Country of Origin

France

“Surprisingly, the expression “Nouvelle Vague,” which refers for everyone today to a moment in French film history and a particular collection of films, such as THE 400 BLOWS and BREATHLESS, was not specifically linked to cinema from the beginning. The label appeared in a sociological investigation of the phenomenon of the new postwar generation, and the inquiry was launched and popularized by a series of articles written by Françoise Giroud for the weekly magazine L’Express (which is the French equivalent of Time or Newsweek). This detail of origins is important... The theme of “the succession of generations,” crucial, as we will see, in regard to the cinema, was already present in the ideological landscape in the late 1950s. France would change its face, its government, and also its cinema.”

—Michel Marie, author of
“The French New Wave: An Artistic School”

Also Recommended, by Truffaut

Shoot the Piano Player 1960
Antoine et Colette 1962
Jules et Jim 1965
L’Enfant sauvage 1970