

Blu-ray Review: Timeless Elegance of ‘Children of Paradise,’ ‘Les Visiteurs du Soir’

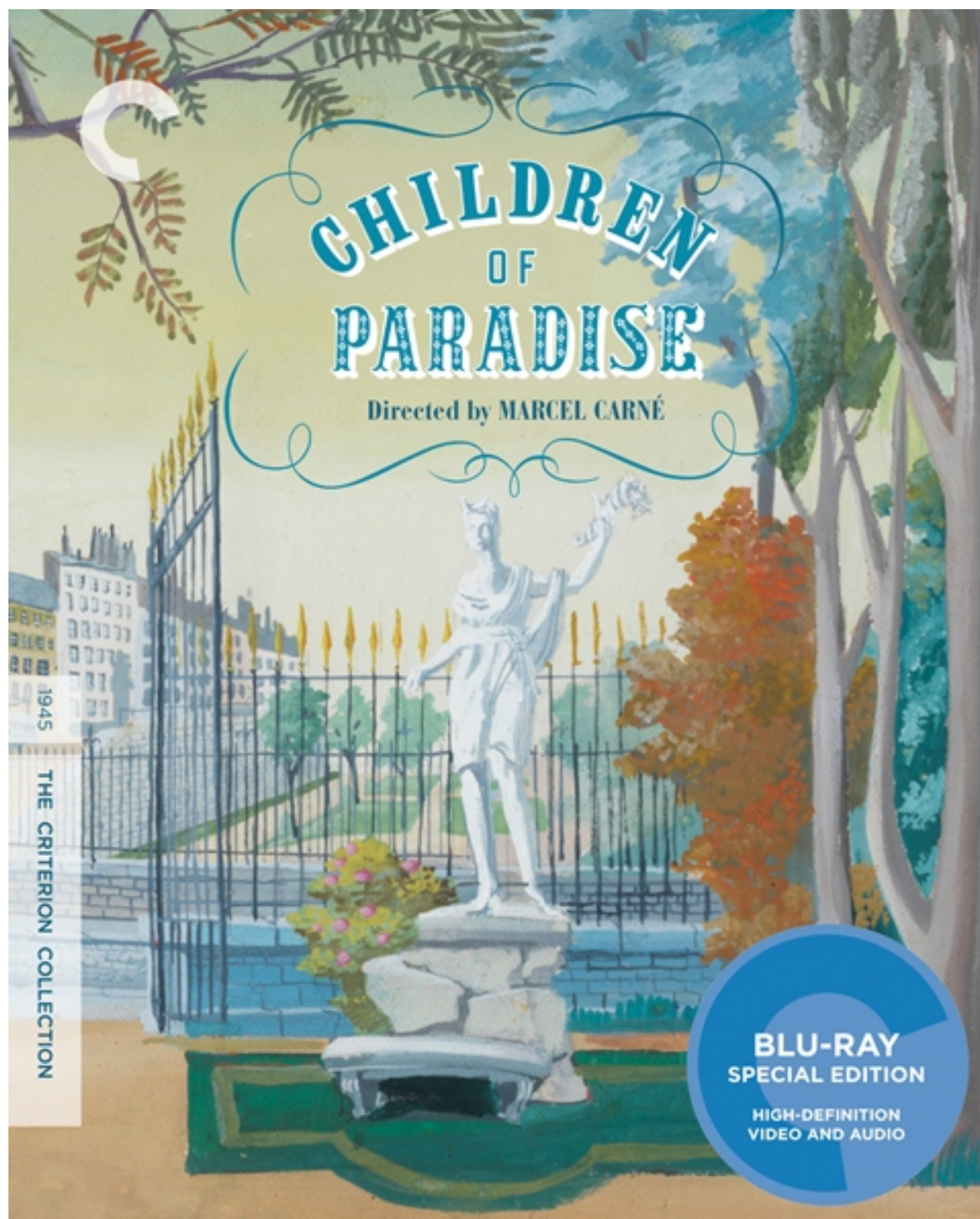
Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on September 24, 2012 - 7:57pm

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CHICAGO – Marcel Carne is one of the most important filmmakers in European history and two of his most timeless efforts, “Children of Paradise” and “Les Visiteurs du Soir,” are two of the most recent films inducted into the most important collection of Blu-rays in the history of the form — The Criterion Collection. “Children” had been a Criterion release before (it’s spine #141) but “Visiteurs” (#626) is new to the collection. Both are gloriously restored version of French classics.

“Children” is the superior of the two, a film that has often been voted the best French film of the last century. It’s often compared to “Gone with the Wind” in its epic scope (it’s 190 minutes long) or at least that’s how it was sold in some markets — “The French Gone with the Wind!” The film is actually much more ambitious thematically than the American epic as wonderfully detailed in a commentary track from film scholars Brian Stonehill and Charles Affron, who break down the many characters, motifs, and cultural issues at play in Carne’s complex film. The Criterion edition of this beautiful work of art is so loaded with special features that they need their own disc. As is often the case, some of the supplemental material is archival (a 1967 documentary that included interviews with many of the major players including Carne and the legendary actress Arletty) and some is more recent (a 2009 doc). For me, it comes back to the film and Pathe’s stunning restoration of it from 2011. The movie has been remastered perfectly with just the right mix of blacks, whites, and the numerous shades in between.

“Visiteurs du Soir” looks just as remarkable and has a lyrical power that may surprise you. “Children” may be the more well-known and influential film but there’s something just as visually striking in Carne’s earlier work that translates as “The Devil’s Envoys.” From the very first shot, the visual confidence here (and how well it’s been remastered in HD) is just breathtaking. I hate to sound like an old man but visual storytelling has degraded in the years that filmmakers have used newer tools to tell, not show. These two great films should remind us of the power of the image.



Children of Paradise was released on Blu-ray on September 18, 2012

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

“Children of Paradise”



Rating: **5.0/5.0**

Synopsis:

Poetic realism reached sublime heights with Children of Paradise, widely considered one of the greatest French films of all time. This nimble depiction of nineteenth-century Paris’s theatrical demimonde, filmed during World War II, follows a mysterious woman (Arletty) loved by four different men (all based on historical figures): an actor, a criminal, a count, and, most poignantly, a street mime (Jean-Louis Barrault, in a longing-suffused performance for the ages). With sensitivity and dramatic elan, director Marcel Carne and screenwriter Jacques Prevert resurrect a world teeming with hucksters and aristocrats, thieves and courtesans, pimps and seers. Thanks to a major new restoration, this iconic classic looks and sounds richer and more detailed than ever.



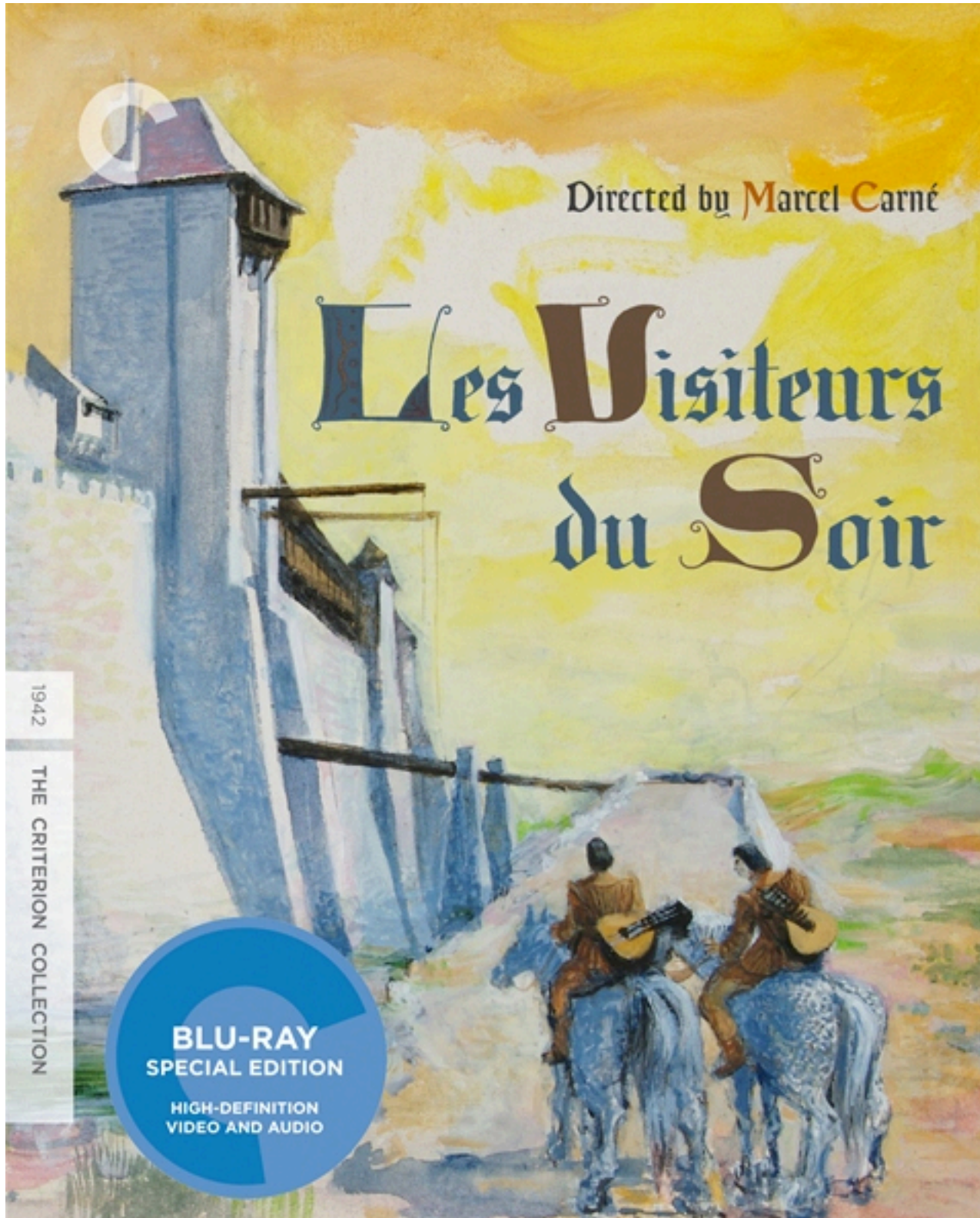
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“Children of Paradise”](#)

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Special Features:

- o Audio Commentaries By Film Scholars Brian Stonehill and Charles Affron
- o Video Introduction by Director Terry Gilliam
- o Restoration Demonstration
- o U.S. Trailer
- o Once Upon A Time: Children Of Paradise a 2009 Documentary On The Making Of The Film
- o New Visual Essay On The Design Of Children Of Paradise By Film Writer Paul Ryan

- o The Birth Of Children Of Paradise, a 1967 Rob Houwer Film Documentary Featuring Interviews With Director Marcel Carne, Actors Arletty, Jean-Louise Barrault, and Pierre Brasseur, Production Designer Alexandre Trauner; and Others
- o Booklet Featuring An Essay By Film Scholar Dudley Andrew and Excerpts From a 1990 Interview With Carne



Les Visiteurs du Soir was released on Blu-ray on September 18, 2012

Photo credit: Courtesy of the Criterion Collection

“Les Visiteurs du Soir”



Rating: **4.0/5.0**

Synopsis:

A work of poetry and dark humor, Les Visiteurs Du Soir is a lyrical medieval fantasy from the great French director Marcel Carne. Two strangers dressed as minstrels (Arletty and Alain Cuny) arrive at a castle in advance of court festivities-and are revealed to be emissaries of the devil, dispatched to spread heartbreak and suffering. Their plans, however, are thwarted by an unexpected intrusion: human love. Often interpreted as an allegory for the Nazi occupation of France, during which it was made, Les Visiteurs Du Soir - wittily written by Jacques Prevert and Pierre Laroche, and elegantly designed by Alexandre Trauner and shot by Roger Hubert - is a moving and whimsical tale of love conquering all.



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“Les Visiteurs du Soir”](#)

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Special Features:

- o L’aventure Des Visiteurs Du Soir 2009 Documentary On The Making Of The Film
- o Trailer

o Booklet Featuring An Essay By Film Critic Michael Atkinson

“Children of Paradise” and “Les Visiteurs du Soir” were released on Criterion Blu-ray and DVD on September 18, 2012.



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By [BRIAN TALLERICO](#) [14]

Content Director

HollywoodChicago.com

brian@hollywoodchicago.com [13]

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[13] <mailto:brian@hollywoodchicago.com>

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