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# Two in the Wave

By [Leon Marvell](#) | Saturday June 25 2011



When François Truffaut's first feature film, *Les quatre cents coups* (*The 400 Blows* – an idiomatic French expression which means 'to raise hell') won the Best Director award at the 1959 Cannes Film Festival, it simultaneously announced the triumph of Truffaut's merciless critique of the French film industry and the birth of *La Nouvelle Vague*. Truffaut encouraged his friend and fellow cinema critic at *Cahiers du Cinema*, Jean-Luc Godard, to pursue his own vision of a 'new wave' in cinema, and a year later Godard himself garnered a Best Director award in Berlin for his *À bout de souffle* (*Breathless*).

It would be hard to overestimate the significance of these two interlinked events for the history of cinema. *Les quatre cents coups* and *À bout de souffle* are the cinematographic equivalents of the explosive premiere of Stravinsky's *Le sacre du printemps* in 1913. After these two films, cinema would never be – *could* never be – the same again.

*Two in the Wave* endeavours to capture the excitement and energy of this collision of twin stars and essays the consequences of the intellectual, creative, and political twining of the careers of Truffaut and Godard. What makes this documentary even more intriguing is its focus on the career of Truffaut's child star, Jean-Pierre L aud, thus analysing the New Wave *syzygy* of Truffaut, Godard and L aud.

The film moves along at quite a pace, perhaps mimicking the often frantic rhythms of Godard's films, or perhaps reflecting the fact that it tries to cover a lot of ground in its 93 minutes. The structure of the film is also rather dense, with archival footage, talking heads, and voice-over sometimes leaving one confused as to whose perspective is being presented or who is doing the talking. Sometimes I was unsure as to whether I was listening to a fragment of audio lifted from one of Truffaut or Godard's films, or whether I was listening to some contemporary talking about the filmmakers' work or its affect on poor Jean-Pierre L aud.

In addition to this density of montage the director has interspersed throughout the film images of young Isild Le Besco looking pensive or pouring over yellowing copies of *Cahiers du Cinema*. I suppose that this is because filmmaker Chris Marker once said of the 21 year old's film *Demi-tarif* (2003) that it was the 21st century answer to Godard's *À bout de souffle* and heralded the beginning of a New New Wave in French cinema. It is perhaps the case that Isild Le Besco has become such an indelible icon in France that her very appearance in a film triggers an associative

stream: youth, bohemia, rebellion, the (French) avant-garde.

Certainly avant-garde, revolutionary events are key tipping-points in this film. The May-June Paris revolution of 1968 provoked a crisis in the friendship between Godard and Truffaut, a crisis from which their friendship would never recover. An exchange of vituperative letters between the two directors – with Léaud caught in the middle – delineated their respective commitments: Godard to revolutionary politics, Truffaut to the art of cinema.

Perhaps the most moving moment in *Two in the Wave* occurs at the very end of the film, during the credits. Here we are privileged to see the 12 year-old Jean-Pierre Léaud's actual screen test for Truffaut's *Les quatre cents coups*. Untrained, fresh off the streets of Paris, Léaud has all the puff and street smarts of Antoine Doinel, the boy he plays in the film. We realise that this is a critical moment in Léaud's life, and that he will be forever changed by his involvement with the cinema and his 'two fathers', Truffaut and Godard.

It is a revelatory moment in a wonderful film.

In terms of extras, the DVD has none at all. But do not let this dissuade you from watching the DVD – the film itself is well worth the admission price.

*Two in the Wave*

**Directed by Emmanuel Laurent**

**France, 2009, 91 mins**

**Madman Entertainment: Arthouse Films series**

**Rated PG**

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