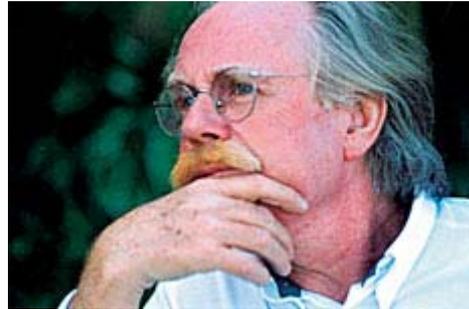


Take five with...Eric Demarsan

French director Jean-Pierre Melville's reputation has grown tremendously over the past decade, with a new generation of filmgoers falling under the spell of his existential noirs from the 1950s and '60s. The quirky Melville—who famously wore a Stetson and drove a Firebird—was a control freak who carefully selected his collaborators. Eric Demarsan was a rare repeat one, writing the scores for both 1969's *Army of Shadows* (opening this Friday at Film Forum) and 1970's *Le Cercle Rouge*. We reached the feisty Demarsan, 67, by phone at his home in a Paris suburb.—*Elisabeth Vincentelli*



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Time Out New York: Melville asked you to write a theme for *Army of Shadows* without showing you any images, right?

Eric Demarsan: He was done with the movie but didn't want me to see it. He just told me he wanted a strong, minimal theme, with a lot of feeling. He was testing me. But he liked what I did and asked me for more.

TONY: Why did he include Morton Gould's "Spirituals for Orchestra" in the film?

ED: He shot a scene to it, then asked me to come up with a carbon copy that we could use in the final mix. I wrote something where the beats, pauses and orchestra entries fell at the same times they do in the Gould piece. I played it for him, and he just said, "Well...no" and kept the other one.

TONY: How did you get the *Cercle Rouge* gig?

ED: I wasn't supposed to do that one originally—Michel Legrand was.

TONY: Really? It's hard to imagine a more different aesthetic from Melville's.

ED: Precisely—they didn't get along at all. So Melville called me. You know, he was a really odd man. He said, "Come to the studio on such and such a day. Be discreet"—I used to wear flashy ruffled shirts—"wear a little gray suit." He didn't want the news of his dispute with Legrand to spread.

TONY: What kind of directions did he give you for *Le Cercle Rouge*?

ED: He gave me lots of tips—and I needed them because I had very little time. For nights on end, he made me watch reels from [1959's] *Odds Against Tomorrow*, a noir movie with Harry Belafonte, in his studio. He was hypnotized by the way it used music. He told me he wanted a similar ambience. In that case, it meant taking a format like that of the Modern Jazz Quartet and putting some strings and brass around it.

TONY: So you went to his house regularly?

ED: Yes, either to work or to listen to music and chat. It was part of the process for him. One day I mentioned Pink Floyd, and I thought he was going to throw the furniture at me. He hated Pink Floyd—well, he hated all pop and rock. He only liked jazz.

[Army of Shadows](#) opens Friday 28 at [Film Forum](#).