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Bande à Part (PG)

dir: **Jean-Luc Godard**

Starring: **Sami Frey, Anna Karina, Claude Brasseur**

Sponsor: **Ann Mallett**

Synopsis: Paris, the 1960s. Odile, a young woman meets Franz at an English language class. She tells him of a large sum of money in the villa which she lives in with her aunt, Mme Victoria and M. Stolz. Franz tells his friend Arthur and they plan a robbery. Arthur's uncle learns of the plan and demands a cut, forcing the three to go through with their idea. When they arrive at the villa, they tie Odile's aunt up, but find the money has been hidden. They go to question the aunt but she appears to be dead. They flee the scene but Arthur says he will go back to check. This is a ploy - he knows where the money is. The other two follow and see Arthur's uncle shoot him. Fatally wounded, Arthur shoots his uncle. M. Stolz arrives. He picks up the money Arthur has found and enters the villa, where Mme Victoria is alive. Odile and Franz leave.

Thinly plotted, indifferently paced, often distracted, filmed against white walls or through drizzle on drab sidewalks, Jean-Luc Godard's 1964 film *Bande à Part* is a movie held together by attitude; its title has long since become a byword for all things timelessly and effortlessly hip and offbeat. Perhaps its importance in the iconography of movie cool has come to overshadow how sad it is, its free-spirited strokes—the famous sprint through the Louvre, the much imitated café dance sequence — made meaningful by its air of dejection. A flop in its original run, *Bande à Part* — which is being released in a new restoration—has come to be regarded as one of Godard's most accessible films. But behind its substantial charm and light touch is a movie that's more morbid, alienated, and personal than it lets on.

It's a story Godard would tell over and over throughout the 1960s, with different subtexts: young men who think only in quotations; young women with conflicted feelings; tragic consequences. Aspiring criminals Arthur (Claude Brasseur) and Franz (Sami Frey) find a doe-eyed accomplice in Odile (Anna Karina, then the director's wife and muse), whose aunt has supposedly stashed a fortune in her house. The viewer almost expects them to never go through with the robbery; nursing competing crushes on Odile, the men seem to be more comfortable in their imaginations than in the real world.



They drive recklessly and aimlessly in a Simca convertible with the top pulled down, noir wannabes in an environment of uninspiring late-winter gray. Thanks to cinematographer Raoul Coutard's superb black-and-white camerawork, Paris looks cold and empty, as though it were a resort town closed for the season.

Bande à Part contains some of the medium's most sublime images of the anything-goes possibility of youth, but it also captures the hopelessness and loneliness of being young with nothing to do. Whether they're planning a crime or performing an impromptu dance routine, the trio is mostly motivated by boredom, and everything carries a tinge of personal darkness; after all, these are men named after writers who died young (Franz Kafka, Arthur Rimbaud), trying to seduce a young woman played by the director's wife—who attempted suicide during pre-production, and came to the set straight from the hospital—and named after his mother, who had died in an accident a decade earlier. Artistic failure, death, and ruined relationships are heavy themes to smuggle into a deconstructed caper comedy that was supposed to be Godard's most commercial project since his groundbreaking debut, *Breathless*.

With Godard as its omniscient voice-over narrator, *Bande à Part* creates an unusual intimacy between director and audience; he often sounds as though he were leaning in on the viewer from behind in a screening room. In other words, it seems deeply personal, even if the audience doesn't know why. And yet it leaves an overwhelming impression of pure creative brio. Countless films have tried to copy its mix of deep-seated melancholy and unpredictable wit, though none have equaled it, in part because it requires tremendous talent and a near-pathological disregard for

expectations and conventions. It's fun and disruptive in ways that are totally unique to filmmaking; the sense of play seeps into everything from the credits (including one of film history's best title cards) and the sound design to the jolting changes in tone. For a movie that's so moody and morose, it sure feels fresh.

Ignatiy Vishnevetsky (AV Club)

Credits

Odile	Anna Karina
Franz	Sami Frey
Arthur	Claude Brasseur
Mme Victoria	Louisa Colpeyn
Arthur's uncle	Ernest Menzer
Arthur's aunt	Chantal Darget
English teacher	Danièle Girard
Narrator	Jean-Luc Godard
Director	Jean-Luc Godard
Screenplay	Jean-Luc Godard (scenario), based on the novel <i>Fool's Gold</i> by Dolores Hitchens
DoP	Raoul Coutard
Editing	Françoise Collin, Dahlia Ezove, Agnès Guillemot
Music	Michel Legrand
France, 1964. 92 mins	

Another View

Godard's most accessible film, *Band of Outsiders* (or *The Outsiders*) (1964) might almost be read, at moments, as a rechanneling of his friend, Truffaut's *Jules and Jim* (1962), if he hadn't already directed *Breathless* (1960), a far more artful study in "outsider" behavior. Of course, Truffaut also did something similar as early as his 1959 film *The 400 Blows*. In each case bad boys or young men pretending to be bad boys, all of them influenced far too much by American gangster movies and Hollywood Westerns, seek out trouble, taking their girlfriends along for the ride.

In nearly all of these films just plain fun is intermixed with dangerous anti-social behavior which ends in death or, at the very least, incarceration. And what was just a lark is transformed into varying statements on societal destruction of the individual which results in robbery and violence against the seemingly deserving society at large.

But then Godard—at least in my estimation—is a far more profound thinker than Truffaut, and his "bad boys"—in this case Franz (the beautiful Sami Frey) and Arthur (Claude Brasseur)—are, like Jean-Paul Belmondo in *Breathless*, diffident decadents, unlike Truffaut's more well-meaning and certainly more well-intentioned delinquent child-men.

In both *Band of Outsiders* and *Jules and Jim*, the characters are trapped in a three-way romance in which part of the characters dangerous actions betray their romantic and romanticized relationships to one another. Jules, Jim, Franz, and Arthur all love their male counterparts, yet despite that fact attempt to outdo each other once they become attracted to the same female, in *Jules and Jim*'s case, Catherine (Jeanne Moreau), and in Godard's film, Odile (Anna Karina). If the homoerotic elements so apparent Truffaut's film are far more muted in Godard's work, it is only because makes their relationship apparent when Franz tells his friend all his secrets, including his budding relationship with Odile and the fact that she has told him her aunt, Madame Victoria (Louisa Colpeyn) has a great deal of money, illegally got by, presumably her sexual partner, M. Stoltz, lying about in an open cabinet. Although

their famous "group" dance of "The Madison," might be perceived as an attempt to share Odile, it is also a statement about their own shared commitments, not so very different from those of Jules and Jim, who work out in the local gym together and are known by nearly everyone as close "friends."

In fact, I would argue, it is the open eroticism of the ménage à trois relationships of both films—which put their characters in the position of children playing seemingly infantile games such as "house" or "doctor"—that allows us to accept the seeming "innocence" of figures who might otherwise be perceived, particularly in the US, as petty street thugs or outright villains. And it is their innocence which also attracts them to the American films they act out, and which allows us to perceive that they cannot tell the difference between fiction and reality. Godard's figures are loveable children, line-dancing in a local bar, racing to beat the record of San Francisco's Jimmy Johnson in racing through the great French art museum, the Louvre, and openly flirting with Odile. And we can hardly be so shocked by their determination to steal M. Stoltz's unhidden money, when he has stolen it, in turn, from the government in tax fraud.

The real villains in this film are Arthur's uncle, who, hearing of their plan, demands a share of the take, and, ultimately, Arthur himself, who betrays his friend's trust by bedding Odile and, later, having figured out where Stoltz has hidden the money they intended to rob, returns to collect it without the other members of his trio "band." Godard also makes it clear, early in the film, that Franz is the right man for Odile, not Arthur, particularly when Arthur cannot make the liquid flow from one side of her "love tube" to the other. Besides, Franz is cuter and better dressed than his always sweater-wearing, slightly overweight friend.

But the consequences of his betrayal, a melodramatic shoot-out between Arthur and his uncle, which ends in both of their deaths, seems out of proportion to their foiled gangster-like misdeeds. Even if the outsider band think they have accidentally killed Mme. Victoria, Godard's long lensed camera reveals that she has survived the ordeal, and will now surely share in the reclaimed money with Stoltz.

As Franz, driving away with Odile, proclaims, however, they too have not done so badly. With Arthur out of the way, they can travel South on their way to Brazil, knowing that, as Odile's "love tube" reveals, Franz is able to make the liquid flow her way.

Godard's figures understand themselves as fictional characters, whereas Truffaut's figures seem to forget the game they are playing and end up more tragically for that fact. *Band of Outsiders* even announces that the adventures of Franz and Odile will be portrayed in an all-color sequel—perhaps, one might imagine, realized in his 1965 film *Pierrot le Fou*.

Douglas Messerli (World Cinema Review)

**Our next screening: Friday January 20th, 7.30pm
Love and Friendship (USA/Ireland/UK 2016. Cert U)**

This is Jane Austen done as she should be: Whit Stillman specialises in sharp, witty dialogue and Austen serves him perfectly. The screenplay is adapted by Stillman himself from a short novella, *Lady Susan*, written by Austen early in her career. There are flowing dresses, bonnets galore, handsome locations and a cast to die for (Kate Beckinsale, Chloë Sevigny, Stephen Fry). If you haven't seen this tremendous comedy of manners before, you are in for a treat - and if you have, treat yourself all over again.