



JEAN COCTEAU

Born: Jean Maurice Eugène Clément Cocteau, July 5, 1889 (Maisons-Lafitte, Yvelines, Île-de-France, France); died 1963 (Milly-la-Forêt, Essonne, Île-de-France, France).

Directing style: Icon of French avant-garde cinema; master of surrealism; created a personal mythology onscreen; reverse-filming techniques; fantastical set design.

Painter, poet, playwright, novelist, set designer, and director, Jean Cocteau perfected the art of the surrealist special effect. He is perhaps most famous for his masterwork, the Orphic trilogy: *Le sang d'un poète* (1930) (*The Blood of a Poet*), *Orphée* (1950) (*Orpheus*), and *Le testament d'Orphée, ou ne me demandez pas pourquoi!* (1960) (*The Testament of Orpheus*).

In *The Blood of a Poet* the viewer is taken on an odyssey into the mind of the artist, replete with talking statues, attempts to fly, and suicide. In *Orpheus*, poetic transmissions on a car radio lure Orphée into his deepest desires and the underworld. Orphée was played by Cocteau's long-time homosexual lover, Jean Marais. He communes with the princess of death by walking through a mirror into Cocteau's underworld. Characters return from the dead by reverse imagery, the film running backward so they can spring back into the living world. When Beauty enters the hall of the Beast, enchantment bursts forth via a procession of disembodied arms reaching out of the walls, torches in hand, to light her way.

The Testament of Orpheus stars Cocteau as the poet, and features appearances by artist Pablo Picasso and novelist Françoise Sagan. The poet looks back on a long career of artistic achievement, and comes to realize the existence of immortality through his artworks. Cocteau created a self-contained world that is truly unique, one in which leather-clad bikers are escorts into the underworld, and a battle among warring factions of artists at the poets' café is believably the most important issue of day-to-day existence. *La belle et la bête* (1946) (*Beauty and the Beast*) is a visually splendid screen telling of the fairy tale that must be seen for Marais's portrayal of the exceedingly charming beast. **HB**

Top Takes...

Le testament d'Orphée, ou ne me demandez pas pourquoi! 1960
(*The Testament of Orpheus*)

8 x 8: *A Chess Sonata in 8 Movements* 1957

La Villa Santo-Sospir 1952

Orphée 1950 (*Orpheus*)

Coriolan 1950

Les parents terribles 1948
(*The Storm Within*)

L'aigle à deux têtes 1948
(*The Eagle has Two Heads*)

La belle et la bête 1946
(*Beauty and the Beast*)

Le sang d'un poète 1930
(*The Blood of a Poet*)

Jean Cocteau fait du cinéma 1925

"I love cats because I enjoy my home; and little by little they become its visible soul."

RIGHT: Jean Marais, Jean Cocteau, and Josette Day on the set of *Beauty and the Beast*.

