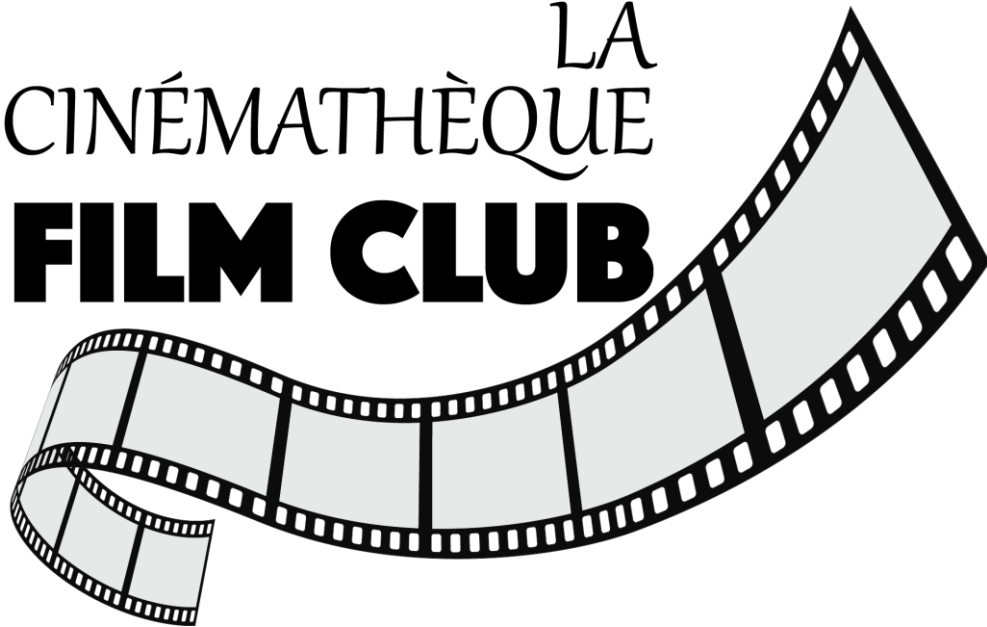


LA  
CINÉMATHEQUE  
**FILM CLUB**



*Cinéma du Look*  
Spring 2021

**Luc Besson**  
b.1959

*Le Grand Bleu*  
1988

## **The Big Blue: Film**

From Time Out: <https://www.timeout.com/movies/the-big-blue>

### **Time Out says**

The action centres on the rivalry between free-divers Barr and Reno - they dive deep without an aqualung - which begins when they are little boys. The first time you see someone plunging into alien blackness is exciting, but the novelty soon wears off. The first half-hour is the best part of the movie. Going through her usual kooky routine, Arquette plays a New York insurance agent who encounters Barr in Peru, and is captivated by his wide-eyed innocence (which others might describe as bovine stupidity). Her sole purpose seems to be to reassure the audience that there is nothing funny going on between best buddies Barr, who talks to dolphins, and Reno, a macho mother's boy (a performance of much comic credibility). The ending is the worst part of the movie: Barr rejects the pregnant Arquette in favour of going under one last time to become a dolphin-man. Such bathos reeks of cod-Camus. What lies in between is a series of CinemaScopic swathes of blue seas and white cliffs. Besson's film is exactly like his hero: very pretty but very silly.

### **Details**

#### **Release details**

Rated: 15

Duration: 119 mins

#### **Cast and crew**

Director: [Luc Besson](#)

Screenwriter: Luc Besson, Robert Garland, Marilyn Goldin, Jacques Mayol, Marc Perrier

Cast: [Rosanna Arquette](#), [Jean-Marc Barr](#), [Jean Reno](#), Paul Shenar, Sergio Castellitto, Jean Bouise, Griffin Dunne

## Luc Besson Filmography as Director

<b>Anna</b>	2019/II
<b>Cara Delevingne: I Feel Everything</b> (Video short) (uncredited)	2017
<b>Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets</b> (directed by)	2017
<b>Afflelou: Moi c'est Afflelou</b> (Video short)	2015
<b>Lucy</b>	2014/I
<b>The Family</b> (directed by)	2013/I
<b>The Lady</b>	2011
<b>Arthur 3: The War of the Two Worlds</b>	2010
<b>The Extraordinary Adventures of Adèle Blanc-Sec</b>	2010
<b>Kery James Feat. Béné: L'impasse</b> (Video short)	2009
<b>Arthur et la vengeance de Maltazard</b>	2009
<b>Madonna: Celebration - The Video Collection</b> (Video) (video "Love Profusion")	2009
<b>Arthur and the Invisibles: The Making of the Year's Greatest Adventure</b> (TV Movie documentary) (uncredited)	2007
<b>Arthur and the Invisibles</b>	2006
<b>Angel-A</b>	2005
<b>Le Court Des Grands</b> (Video documentary short)	2005
<b>Madonna: Love Profusion</b> (Video short)	2004
<b>The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc</b>	1999
<b>Chanel No. 5: Le Loup</b> (TV Short)	1998
<b>The Fifth Element</b>	1997
<b>De Serge Gainsbourg à Gainsbarre de 1958 - 1991</b> (Video documentary) (segment "Mon légionnaire" 1988")	1994
<b>Léon: The Professional</b>	1994
<b>Mylène Farmer: My Soul Is Slashed</b> (Video short)	1992
<b>Atlantis</b> (Documentary)	1991/I
<b>Nikita</b>	1990
<b>Serge Gainsbourg: Mon légionnaire, B&amp;W Version</b> (Video short)	1988
<b>The Big Blue</b>	1988
<b>Richard Berry: Black Out</b> (Video short)	1985
<b>Subway</b>	1985
<b>Isabelle Adjani: Pull marine</b> (Video short)	1984
<b>The Last Battle</b>	1983
<b>The Penultimate</b> (Short)	1981

## Thirty years ago, *Le Grand Bleu* (*The Big Blue*) shook the Croisette

Article sourced from Festival de Cannes: <https://www.festival-cannes.com/en/72-editions/retrospective/2018/actualites/articles/thirty-years-ago-le-grand-bleu-the-big-blue-shook-the-croisette#>

In 1988, the Festival de Cannes opened to *Le Grand Bleu* (*The Big Blue*) by the young Luc Besson. In his third feature film, accompanied by the already faithful Jean Reno, the director unveiled his extraordinary technical ambitions. Thirty years later, the film finds itself again on the screen at Cannes in Cinéma de la Plage, in a restored version.

*Le Grand Bleu* (*The Big Blue*). Film of an entire generation. 14 million people around the world immersed themselves in this underwater tale of friendship and rivalry that begins at childhood on a Greek island between two free divers, Jacques Mayol (Jean-Marc Barr) and Enzo Molinari (Jean Reno).

Everything drove Luc Besson to submerge his camera. When he met the great free diver Jacques Mayol, this son of a diving instructor decided to plunge into *Le Grand Bleu* (*The Big Blue*), an ambitious project. The project was set back several times: in the beginning, Christophe Lambert was supposed to play the leading role, but the actor had to decline after suffering a diving accident. To this was added the catastrophic trial and error of using underwater cameras, and the financial hole the film dug itself into.

All the effort paid off, however and *Le Grand Bleu* (*The Big Blue*) dropped anchor at Cannes in 1988. Spectators didn't need to sit through the entire 128 minutes of the film before being immediately swept off into a vertiginous underwater adventure magnified by the music of Éric Serra. At the exit, opinion among the critics was split between praise for the spectacular reverie offered by Luc Besson and booing from some of the journalists.

Regardless, the film was a unanimous success with the spectators, much greater than expected. In France, 9 million viewers rushed to the cinema, making the film a phenomenon that led the press to speak of a “*generation Grand Bleu*” (Big Blue generation).



## Le Grand bleu (1988) : Film Review

Article sourced from French Films: <http://www.frenchfilms.org/review/le-grand-bleu-1988.html>

Luc Besson's most personal film is a haunting visual elegy concerned with one man's passion to be united with the sea he loves and another man's obsession to dominate it. All of Besson's films are distinguished by a strong visual style which makes characterisation and plot virtually redundant, but in *Le Grand Bleu*, regarded by many as his finest achievement, he surpasses himself. From the first scene, the spectator is drawn in Besson's world and soon begins to share his sense of wonder and understand his undying passion for the sea.

Although the film has been criticised for lacking much in the way of a plot, the film has enough of a plot to give it direction and meaning. This is a very spiritual film, a film which communicates directly with the soul, something which gives it great power and eloquence. Jacques Mayol is overwhelmed by his love for the sea, longing for an alternative existence, whilst his girlfriend is equally obsessed with a very earthy desire which he cannot participate fully in. This conflict of the spiritual and the physical is portrayed with great power and sensitivity, and its resolution at the end of the film is devastatingly effective.

Despite being initially mauled by the critics, the film became a major box office success in Europe, attracting nine million viewers in France alone. It failed to repeat this success in the United States, probably because of a botched re-edit. The American release saw the film reduced by 50 minutes, switched the ambiguous fairy-tale ending with a conventional happy ending (in which Mayol and Johanna are re-united), and replaced Erica Serra's brilliant and evocative score (which contributed a great deal to the original film's impact). The film was re-released a decade later in its longer form, running to nearly 3 hours, and this is widely acknowledged as the best version.

### Film Synopsis

Jacques Mayol and Enzo Molinari are two men who have shared an intense passion for the sea since their childhood. Molinari, the current world free diving champion, coerces Mayol into competing against him in the next tournament. When Mayol beats his record, Molinari is determined to win it back again. A dangerous friendly duel ensues. Meanwhile, Mayol is pursued by a young insurance clerk, Johanna, who is madly in love with him, although the young diver is unable to respond to her affections. In the end, Mayol has to choose between the sea and his pregnant girlfriend...

## Profundities

Article sourced from CineOutsider: [http://www.cineoutsider.com/reviews/bluray/b/big\\_blue.html](http://www.cineoutsider.com/reviews/bluray/b/big_blue.html)

*A UK Blu-ray review of **THE BIG BLUE** / **LE GRAND BLEU** – film review by Camus, technical specs, extras and summary by Slarek*

Spirituality is not a subject I can breezily write about or easily embrace. This isn't only because I'm a militant atheist. It's because spiritual matters are intensely personal and are more connected with one's own emotional spaghetti intertwined with feelings that are strictly indefinable. The unimaginative souls credit the known – Jesus and his ilk – for blessing them with such profound feelings of serenity and enlightenment but there is a part of the human experience that must recognise that we are able to feel beyond which is mundane and ordinary and even rational. I adore the meaning of the word 'enthusiasm' – the god within. Now that's my kind of deity. **The Big Blue** is a movie suffused with the spiritual, crammed with the non-corporeal, the connection to nature (in hero Jacques' case, the ocean) that offers us ethereal sustenance beyond our nagging earthly necessities. And if you think that lot's pretentious, I've not even started.

Only in a movie can you present a final act of such brutal and overwhelming selfishness (there had to be a 'fish' in there somewhere) that constitutes the ending of this film and manage to have it imbued with a spiritual grandeur. It's an extraordinary coup de cinema. A brilliant novelist might manage it but in lesser directorial hands, the ending of **The Big Blue** is a downer in every sense, literal or otherwise. Young director and writer Luc Besson knows what he's doing (you get a sense he's lived some of it) and the surprising emotions he conjures up in his extraordinary film continue to astonish me (and I have seen dolphins before on film, edited quite a few too but none quite as touching as Besson's own metaphorical sirens, the finned guides for Jacques' transcendent 'homecoming').

**The Big Blue** is a movie about a dry-dock dolphin aching to get back to the sea despite the awkward fact of his human body's land-based limitations. He has personal connections, family and a friend, but very few real relationships, aspects of normal human life that seem beyond or even below this web footed Adonis. One gets the sense he only has a best friend because of the continual competition between him and bon viveur and egoist, fellow free diver, Enzo. This competitive "I-can-dive-deeper-and-hold-my-breath-for-longer," routine holds Enzo in place for all of his life while to Jacques, the competitions are simply opportunities to commune with the deep blue sea. There is never any pride or joy at being the best, just the deep contentment at being where he feels he belongs. What we, and Jacques' human lover Johana, call dark and cold, Jacques calls home. And it's that calling that defines Jacques through whose eyes (and gills) we must be prepared to experience **The Big Blue**. Keep your rational humanity to the fore and Luc Besson's wondrous magic spell of a film is broken. Get inside Jacques and the film floats tantalisingly in front of you whilst you can almost taste the brine. Literal readings of the text are to be frowned upon. To get **The Big Blue** you have to be prepared to get wet, sexual allusion implied. I'll not bog you down in the Freudian analysis though this movie is rich pickings for those of that bent. I mean for goodness' sake, a man penetrates that which is wet and goes very deep. It's Freud 101 as the Americans might say. Let's get back to practicalities and fond memories.

In the late-80s, I worked with an assistant who was utterly besotted with the, admittedly, über-handsome actor Jean Marc Barr (playing free diver Jacques Mayol). When I told her that he lived locally, it was all she could

do to hold herself together. Each lunch trip into town, her eyes would be on stalks waiting to see if he'd simply walk past her (in slow motion with goggles and a red wet suit, one presumes). I'd seen him in a deli on several occasions and unless he was on a year's holiday, I'd made the leap he lived in West Hampstead or thereabouts while studying in London. My assistant was a girl who could pull men's eyes, hearts and souls in her direction without so much as a come hither glance. She had that confident beauty that only intelligent, centred women possess. But such was the power of Barr to reduce even her to a quivering mess of self-consciousness.

Barr possesses the sort of sculpted attraction that other men desire and of which they are darkly envious. I know some who reject it out of hand but nevertheless Barr is blessed with what a great many women classify as archetypal good looks. I consistently ask my partner if so and so is attractive as I'm curious what floats peoples' boats. She had little hesitation in earmarking Monsieur Barr as someone she would have pursued without any real forethought. Hell, my assistant named her first child 'Blue'... Not sure this was a reference but you never know. This alluring young woman was working with someone just as smitten by an onscreen personality – me. I was nursing a major crush on a young actress I'd first seen on American TV in a film directed by indie favourite John Sayles, **Baby It's You**. Rosanna Arquette's character, sensuality, charm, innocence and sheer sex appeal knocked me flat. She had that off-centre attraction that made you think you were the only one who could recognise it. Nonsense, of course. And blast it, she definitely didn't live locally.

I'd known Luc Besson's work from his full feature debut, the quietly impressive **Le Dernier Combat** and I was so-so regarding **Subway**. I'd had enough pre-publicity oomph for me to work myself into a lather over **The Big Blue**. Arquette was in it so I was along for the ride regardless of its merits. For those of you yet untouched by Besson's very personal but still big movie (the biggest French money maker that decade apparently), it's a story about a chronically socially awkward young man (Barr) who has an affinity with the sea and dolphins in particular. His rival, the brash and entertaining Jean Reno (Enzo), invites him to the world free diving championships where he establishes a relationship with Arquette, an insurance agent struck by Barr's striking magnetism while on a claim investigation in South America. But Barr's attraction to his ocean and dolphins is enough to keep him from enjoying what this reviewer at the time would have regarded as heaven, sharing his life with Rosanna Arquette.

In all respects, **The Big Blue** is a confident piece of work whose running time, in its eventual 'director's cut' version, on the Blu Ray release, is a not inconsiderable 168 minutes. That's a little short of three hours but the characters are sufficiently intriguing, the mise en scene assured and the location-hopping worthy of a Bond picture. It looks gorgeous, sumptuous even. And of all the Gallic cheek to present the first scene of the movie in black and white, a movie that emphasizes colour in almost every other way. It's curious that the flashback we get to that time when Jacques was a child is in colour. Is this Besson saying something about memory? We start off in Greece when as a child Jacques was in some competition with a larger child (the casting of the leads as children here is almost ridiculously spot on). Jacques was evidently a water baby even then but Enzo was bigger and claimed the burly bully status. After a tragic accident, Jacques is left helplessly clawing at the surface of the water, the element that entrances him and yet the same element that has claimed his father.

As we cut forward, in an explosion of music (more on that contribution a little later), we bring on Enzo, now all grown up into the dashing cool and top heavy French icon, Monsieur Jean Reno. I will not sing this man's praises (I'll let Slarek do that in the **Leon** review) but I will remind you that even the coolest have their

weaker moments. I mean even Harrison Ford has advertised cars in Europe. He owns half of Wyoming. Maybe he's saving up for the other half. Reno's appearances in commercials (yes, the UPS ones trade on his Gallic large nosed USP and aren't as horrendous as some out there) are those I find difficult to accept from any artist unless the money's not the issue. But we'll gloss over that. Reno is bloody marvellous as Enzo. With a voice that spent a significant period in Rustynailville, he grates out his lines in a lower register that teases the sub woofers. He's larger than life and happy to play the role of the lesser man. Well, perhaps happy is too strong a word but Enzo knows his limits and he knows Jacques is as close to dolphin as any man could be. Even Enzo cannot compete but demands to do so to keep testing himself. Their relationship is the only thing anchoring Barr to the earth. Not even a heterosexual relationship with Rosanna Arquette can do that for Monsieur Mayol. So to me, he's beyond saving...

Barr is above the movie in the same way his soul is below the waves. He is so disconnected to human affairs even in the act of sex he seems to be the passive participant. This works, of course, because if you took Barr's performance as a human being, he'd be the most selfish creature on the planet. His treatment of his lover is pretty reprehensible (he does silence a great deal) and his understanding of the needs of others is pretty much in the minus number category but. Big but. When he smiles, it lights up his soul and that's what Arquette responds to. And when he's underwater he's a different animal. One of the most frustrating scenes of the film is Arquette trying to tell him something important. She leaps into the water (his element) and he is sufficiently intrigued to join her but then the conversation becomes one way as he frolics on the surface breaking her heart with his colossal insensitivity but then he's not all human... Remember that.

Arquette seems to have come under some fire for being miscast as Johana Baker. Yes, there are moments in the film where experience might have upped the performances a little but remember, Besson wasn't even 30 when he directed **The Big Blue** (and Arquette was five months younger). This isn't to excuse the actress's occasional unease with some of her scenes (frankly I just adore Arquette and even in a role that requires her to be smitten enough to travel all around the world, she acquits herself well). And commercially she was pretty hot being nominally the first billed star of the movie. But she also has a thankless task. She has to be the human element in a movie about a dolphin. She has to be the voice of reason in a film about spiritual matters and that's always going to tie her down, sympathy wise. She was dealt an uneasy hand but played it well regardless.

The one element of **The Big Blue** that seems to do everything right takes the movie in a crushing bear hug and drives up the spirituality, forces those tears out and just makes you smile with the sheer impetuosity of its grandstanding. The only person credited in the front credits with his own stand out box is composer Eric Serra and played on the right kit, his music is stunning. It manages to retain the emotional while jettisoning convention. The instruments don't even seem to want to be mixed together but somehow it all works gloriously. We get the longing, the hurt and the distance but we also get Jacques' soul. Serra's contribution to the cinema of Luc Besson cannot be underestimated. One of my fondest memories of a screening of **Nikita** in London many years ago was having a short discussion with a friend I was with in a party of five. We idly wondered if Serra had done the score for **Nikita**. We were seats apart. The movie was two seconds in and as we heard the oh so distinctive Serra main theme, we both leaned forward, looked at each other and mouthed "Yes!" in sync. Nice.



**The Big Blue** is a film with heart but that heart beats underwater and you have to adjust your own wiring to fully appreciate that. But if you do, you will be richly rewarded.

sound and vision

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Let's be honest, of all the early Besson films, this is the one that stands to benefit most from the Blu-ray treatment, it's sunshine soaked exteriors, glorious locations and hypnotic underwater photography just crying out for a top notch HD image. Well that pretty much what they've got. Fabulous colour reproduction, deliciously crisp detail and near-perfect contrast make this a delight for the eyes in the sunlit exteriors, and although the night scenes are less striking, they are still impressive, with the blacks staying solid and shadow detail good. Grain is intermittently visible but is never a problem.

The PCM 48 stereo track is clear with a reasonable dynamic range, and at it best on underwater sound effects and music (which packs some serious wallop in places if you run the lower frequencies through the sub), which co-incidentally is where you'll also hear the best use of frontal separation. The dialogue is in French with optional English subtitles. Ah.

And it's here that we encounter the Achilles heel of this otherwise very fine Blu-ray release. Another Optimum licence from French distributor Gaumont, the disc inevitably includes the French dub, but is inexplicably missing the original English language track. Now I know this is a French made film with one French lead actor (and another who is fluent in the language), but this was famously Besson's first English language film and almost all of the dialogue was delivered and recorded in English. If you're looking for confirmation then observe the mismatch between mouth movements and dialogue and check out the English language track on 20th Century-Fox's DVD for comparison – you can even find supporting evidence in the making-of documentary on this very disc. This means the release is missing the film's original soundtrack, a frankly inexcusable omission and really does detract from total enjoyment of the film, particularly when Rosanna Arquette's character switches from her occasional English to French and someone else's voice steps in to replace that of the actress. Reno and Barr appear to have dubbed their own voices.

extra features

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### *L'Aventure de Grand Bleu* (97:00) 576p

A feature length behind-the-scenes documentary transferred at 576p, presumably from the French 2-disc special edition DVD, and a little fuzzy on picture detail. A leisurely-paced stroll through the shoot, with voice-over comments provided by Luc Besson, Jean Reno and Jean-Marc Barr, the action is often observed from a distance but there's plenty of interesting stuff here, particularly in the filming of specific scenes (including the water-in-the-bedroom sequence and the ice dive) and the news that the two leads did all their own diving and trained extensively to be able to hold their breath for extended periods and descend to 30 metres without breathing apparatus. "Obviously, once you go past 30 metres," observes Reno, "you can feel you'd have to be as mad as the real-life Mayol to go any further." Interesting to learn that Barr could only hold his breath for 40 seconds when first hired but had, in Besson's words, "an aquatic way of moving," while Reno in the water was "as stiff as a board." Also intriguing is that Besson cast his leading men based partly on their physique, believing that Jacques would be a skinny man who dives with his head, whereas the muscular Enzo would rely on his lungs.

There's a genuinely touching moment as the crew dance in unison for a tearfully departing Rosanna Arquette, and a funny sequence in which Besson and Reno squeakily engage in banter after inhaling helium. Initially targeted at a French audience only, the adaptation for the UK market produces some minor absurdities, as dialogue is delivered in English, then is translated into French through voice-over, which subtitles then translate back to English.

***The Big Blue – Theatrical Version*** (137:26)

Included as an extra is the original theatrical cut of the film, which is of the same quality and effectively the same transfer, the different edits likely achieved through branching. I've no intention of going through the differences shot by shot – the director's cut does not drastically alter any aspect of the story, but does allow many scenes to play out in more detail. I've long ago accepted the director's cut – or *version longue* as it was known as on its release – as the definitive version, and returning to the earlier edit simply feels like someone's been at it with scissors. Mind you, this is still preferable to the original American release, which trimmed the running time to 118 minutes, added a happy ending and replaced Eric Serra's oh-so-right score with one by Bill Conti.

Also included are two **trailers** for the film, which are letterboxed within a 4:3 frame and 576p. Both are interesting, with the opening teaser (0:43) neatly ambiguous, and the American theatrical trailer (1:47) sporting the dialogue as it was recorded and the wrong music.

summary

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**The Big Blue** is a still enthralling and sometimes hypnotically realised story of friendship, love and obsession, with only the cartoonish presentation of the Japanese divers coming across as misjudged, and even then we're talking a two minute sequence in a near three-hour film. The transfer is as lovely as you'd hope, but the absence of the original English language track is a serious omission that prevents this from being the definitive version it should be, particularly given the inclusion of two cuts of the film and a substantial extra feature. There's an irony in the decision to shoot in English anyway, which was probably taken with an eye on the American market, the one country in which the film flopped on its original release, and there's almost the sense that in omitting the English language track, Gaumont were reclaiming the film for the French language in which it might otherwise have been shot. But in releasing the same disc onto the UK market without the restoration of the said English soundtrack, Optimum have really dropped the ball. If this doesn't bother you – and frankly it should – then you should be delighted with this disc, but despite the splendid picture quality, that missing audio track makes it hard to recommend. A damned shame.