



PRESS STORIES

Publication: E.A.S.E Greenwich Citizen (Greenwich, CT)
Date: March 9, 2007
Author: Zack Greenspon
Title: **Le weekend**

A BIGGER, BETTER FILM FESTIVAL.

When the Alliance Française of Greenwich held its first Focus on French Cinema film festival three years ago, it realized that there would be some difficulties in hosting a successful event. The glaring issue was how to make an event that seem so specialized (would a French and Francophone event intrigue local filmgoers?) appeal to the public.

The initial questions translated into difficulties with screenings in the first year. Instead of getting movies on film, the festival could only obtain DVD's for screenings.

Now, however, the third annual festival of French cinema at the Performing Arts Center at Purchase College, Purchase, NY, has demonstrated its appeal to the community and developed into a premier event.

"It's amazing what (the festival) has evolved from", said Renée Ketcham, a member of the film festival's executive board. "We didn't have the money or the funds to do 35mm, so we started with DVD. We realized very quickly that you can't do a festival on DVD.

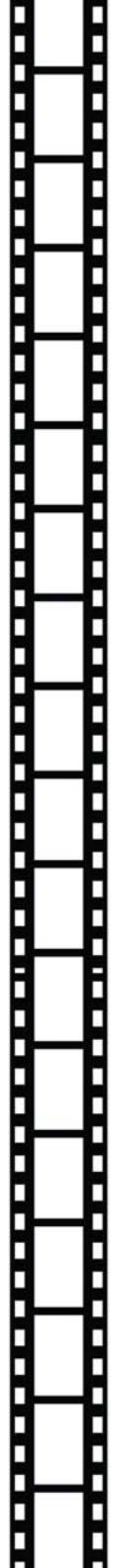
But with support from Coline Serreau, who directed "Chaos" and discussed the film at the first festival's opening night, it turned out OK.

"We've evolved to the point were we've raised money. We have some really wonderful sponsors who have allowed us to do all films on 35mm", said Ketcham.

Not only has the presentation of the films improved, but also the festival's attendance has grown. Up from 800 attendees the first year and 2, 000 the last year, the Alliance Française expects 3, 000 to come this year, including a number of high-profile guests. Attending the third incarnation of the festival will be French Ambassador to the United States Jean-David Levitte, and Ambassador of Francophonie to the U.N., Hervé Cassan, among others.

Another change that Ketcham was quick to point out with this year's festival is the infusion of youth into the film selection process. Jeanne Milleliri, 21, a native of Marseilles, France, who attends Sciences-Politiques, came to the United States for an internship with the Alliance Française. Milleliri has been working on the festival for the past seven months, and Ketcham says that it is impossible to overestimate her importance.

"I think everyone on the committee would say that (Jeanne's) knowledge of French film has helped us," said Ketcham. "For example, for the first time ever, we're doing short films. The amount of research she has done... she really has brought something young and new ideas."





PRESS STORIES

Publication: E.A.S.E Greenwich Citizen (Greenwich, CT)
Date: March 9, 2007
Author: Zack Greenspon
Title: **Le weekend**

Milleliri studied cinema in preparation for her baccalauréat (a French exam administered to students at the terminus of their secondary education) and provides the festival with a contemporary take on French cinema along with a devotion to film that was beneficial in selecting which movies to screen.

"I think I saw 30 or 25 films," said Milleliri, explaining her preparation for the festival. "it was very difficult to pick out the movies, but it was interesting to share (thoughts) with the others (on the executive board)."

Seeking to be more than just a film festival, the Alliance Française hopes to bring the type of debate that occurred when selecting the films to the screenings. According to Milleliri, one of the main criteria for films (aside from the French language track) was that each work needed to be provocative enough to allow a question-and-answer session following the screenings.

The discussion after the films will present the audience with the opportunity to discuss the works with cinema professors, including purchase's Anne Kern and director of "J'invente rien" and Luc Picard, who made "L'Audition" are scheduled to be in attendance to discuss their works on April 1 and March 31, respectively.

Focus on French Cinema will also have an opening night buffet catered by the Maitres Cuisiniers de France, Veuve Cliquot and Le Wine Shop of Greenwich. The goal of the question-and-answer sessions and the buffet, according to Ketcham, is to create a sense of community at the festival.

"We want you to feel like you're part of the festival on opening night," said Ketcham. "People will be able to mingle between films and meet directors or just visit bookshops. We want this to be an event that the community looks forward to."

For this goal to be achieved, Ketcham realizes the initial hesitation many might have about going to a Franco-centric event will need to be overcome.

"We would like to bring French and American culture together with something that universally pleases film," Ketcham explained after she experienced some "French Bashing" comments when the festival first began. "This way, however, we have a medium that people can talk about and share."

With the Growth in attendance from the first year to the present, it appears that the goal of the festival will be met sooner rather than later, and in Greenwich, at least, cultural acceptance might come with a shared tub of popcorn.

Tickets for opening night are 80\$; a three-day pass that includes the buffet and tickets to each screening will cost 95\$. Scheduling and ticket information can be found at www.focusonfrenchcinema.org. All films will be shown on 35mm with English subtitles.

