



## PRESS STORIES

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**Date:** March 2007  
**Author:** Kristan Zimmer  
**Title:** **Cinema series focuses on the French**

Focus on French Cinema 2007, the third annual festival of French cinema, opens on Friday, March 30, with the United States premiere of *Le Héros de la Famille* (*The Family Hero*).

Renée Ketcham, one of the three founders of the film series, said it is a drama but would not reveal too much plot about the movie. "We want it to be a surprise", the Greenwich resident said.

Ms. Ketcham, along with fellow Greenwich residents Catherine Lamaisse and Gail Covney, a French teacher at Stanwich School, came up with the idea to run a French film series three years ago, after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11. Ms Ketcham said there was a period of "French bashing" that took place as America geared up for war.

"We really thought this was a great way to bring people together who have a common interest, which is film," she said. "We all love to go to the movies."

The Performing Arts Center at Purchase College will once again host the festival, which is organized by the Alliance Française of Greenwich, in partnership with Purchase College and French Feeling Films; Tournées, a program of the French embassy; Délégation Générale du Québec in New York; the Westchester Accueil, and the Greenwich Arts Council.

The festival will feature 11 new and recently released French films, including three U.S. premieres.

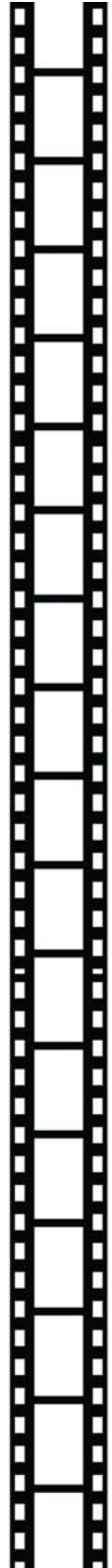
Directed by Thierry Klifa, *Le Héros de la Famille*, features an all-star cast and tell the story of an intricate family reunion around a cabaret on the French Riviera. This month, the Focus on French Cinema film series announced that Claude Brasseur, one of the lead actors in *Le Héros*, will be the film series guest for the week end.

David Schwartz, chief curator of the Museum of the Moving Image, will introduce the premiere and conduct an audience discussion with invited actors and directors. An "après-théâtre" gala buffet will be sponsored by the Maîtres-Cuisiniers de France, Le Wine Shop and Champagne Veuve Clicquot. Other events, include student screenings of *Bon Voyage*, directed by Jean-Paul Rappeneau, and *Viva Laldjerie*, directed by Nadir Moknèche, on Friday, March 30. Both screenings are open to the public.

A "meet with the directors" breakfast on Saturday, March 31 will provide an intimate setting for guests to meet directors and actors. It will be followed by an afternoon screening of *Je m'appelle Elizabeth* (*Call me Elizabeth*), a family film, as well as *L'Audition*, a film from Québec featuring guest actor/director Luc Picard, and a Saturday night screening of *Fair Play*, an East Coast premiere, directed by Lionel Bailliu, with Marion Cotillard and Benoit Magimel.

"It's really interesting to hear how the French choose actors and how they choose to film movies," Ms. Ketcham said. Often when the audience has a chance to talk with directors they ask how the director expected an American audience to react to the film. Everybody's always surprised at the answer."

The weekend continues with a selection of French films, including two more U.S. premieres –*J'invente Rien* (*The Handyman*) and *Un Ticket pour L' espace* (*A Ticket to Outer Space*). All films will be screened in 35mm with English subtitles. New this year





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is a selection of award-winning short films. France is the site of the Clermont-Ferrand Film Festival –the largest short film festival in the world, said Anne Kern of Greenwich, a professor of Cinema Studies at Purchase College.

The Focus on French Cinema festival is placed under the patronage of Jean-David Levitte, French ambassador to the U.S.; Hervé Cassan, ambassador of the Francophonie to the United Nations; François Dellatre, consul general of France in New York and Michel Robitaille, representative of the Délégation Générale du Québec in New York.

The French government is a strong supporter of filmmaking.

“In France film is the seventh art,” Ms. Kern said. “It is considered a fine art.”

Filmmakers like Diane Kurys, who created *Peppermint Soda*, say they wouldn't have entered the industry without government subsidization.

The allure of the French film has drawn more than 2,000 people to last year's film festival (up from 800 the first year) and is expected to draw about 3,00 visitors this year.

“There is something very special about French films,” Ms. Ketcham said.

Part of their uniqueness, Ms. Kern said, is due to the weight of the artistic history in filmmaking in that contemporary filmmakers face. Because it has always been considered a culturally important medium in France, phases of great filmmaking history are a privilege and a burden for contemporary filmmakers.

Films carry great weight in France. For example, *The Chorus* sparked a cultural rejuvenation of children's choruses.

“I can't imagine that happening here – to have a film affect what people are doing.” Ms. Kern said. There is a direct connection between French culture and filmmaking,” Ms. Kern said, “You rarely see it in other places”.

The government assistance also helps a lot.

“They help filmmakers and they do things like the Tournées program to help us put on this festival,” Ms. Kern said.

Focus on French Cinema is sponsored by The Adspace Mall Network, Altour, American Airlines, Calyon, CIC, JC Decaux North America and Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy, with the support of Le Centre national de la Cinématographie.

She said what is great about the festival is that it is growing but still intimate – and just 15 minutes from Greenwich. “You can really get up close and personal with stars,” she said.

Questions, call 629-1340. For more information or tickets, visit [focusonfrenchcinema.org](http://focusonfrenchcinema.org).

