

OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE FESTIVAL DE CANNES FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY RETROSPECTIVE

by M. Rollon Mouchel-Blaisot, Consul General for France

In 1997, as part of the celebrations of its fiftieth anniversary, the Cannes Film Festival showcased twelve outstanding French films dating from 1945 to 1996. Thanks to the collaboration of Gilles Jacob, representative of the Festival International du Film, and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, these films were subsequently made available to the Alliance Française of South Australia for its Fiftieth Anniversary Retrospective, which opened at the Mercury Cinema, Adelaide, on 23 June 1998 with a screening of François Truffaut's 1959 classic, *The 400 Blows*.

The Retrospective was officially opened by the Consul General for France, Rollon Michel-Blaisot, and Phillippe Mortier, President of the SA Alliance Française, with as special guest speakers Judith McCann, CEO of the South Australian Film Corporation, and Alex Frayne, independent filmmaker.

The Consul General began his Opening Speech,

A Tribute to the French Film Festival as follows:

I would like to welcome you all tonight to the kick-off of the retrospective of fifty years of French films at Cannes. From *Monsieur Hulot's Holidays* to François Truffaut's *The 400 blows*, the quality, diversity and uniqueness of these French films are here for you to discover or love again.

[After greeting all the distinguished guests and expressing his heartfelt thanks to the Alliance Française, the Mercury Cinema and the various sponsors, M. Mouchel-Blaisot continued :]

The Cannes Film Festival was created in 1939 by the French Department of Foreign Affairs, but the first session wasn't held until 1947 because of World War II.

Last year I was a personal adviser to the French Minister of Foreign Affairs and I got involved in the preparation of the fiftieth anniversary of the festival. It has left an imprint on my memory. This landmark event turned out to be both fascinating and trying at times. It was a fascinating experience because of the very special atmosphere of the festival, with all the glamour involved, the eighty films in competition, and the 50 000 people who came, some to see and some to be seen.

It is true that Cannes is a major international film market, with 1600 films and 5000 professionals, representing a fifth of the world film industry's turnover of one billion dollars. Accordingly it gets one of the largest media coverages on earth as it is one of the five most important world events, along with the Soccer World Cup and the Olympics.

Being involved with the French Film Festival last year was also a trying time, as when I had to organise the dinner table for 350 international film superstars and VIPs at the Carlton Hotel. Eventually it all went well and I was happy to be part of it, but as I told my boss: "Once is enough!"

In illustration of the great French love of cinema, the aim of this retrospective is to share with you twelve films selected from the 145 French films screened at Cannes over fifty years.

Cinema was invented in France over a century ago, and we have the largest cinema market in Europe. To quote only a few figures, there were 148 000 000 tickets sold in 1997, while the film industry in France means work for 50 000 people and has a 3.7 billion turnover in Australian dollars, comprising ticket sales, export revenue and production outlays. The year 1997 was truly exceptional in the number of tickets sold and films produced and exported. It was a good vintage with growing market share of 34% for France and 53% for the US while the European average was 15%.

The twelve jewels presented to you in this retrospective give a good idea of what Gilles Jacob, who is the general delegate of the festival, means when talks of the "French touch" - the specific quality of French films. There is a French style recognisable through every single one of these films; they take you on a journey where you will become part of the film; you will laugh, cry, fear and hope along with the protagonist, as in *The 400 Blows*. As in *A Sunday in the Country (Un dimanche à la campagne)*, you will notice that a lot of things are left unsaid; it is the power of your imagination that should take over, with all these feelings stirred by the magic touch and the references. French films carry a willingness to express the French way of life, of thinking, of resistance to uniformity, and these qualities can be synonymous with good business.

I would like to emphasise the specific quality of French movies, which resist the global trend of tasteless, odourless and cultureless cinema. This doesn't mean that we don't appreciate foreign movies, on the contrary we wish to support great cinema throughout the world, as well as co-operation between different cultures.

That is why last year, the French Minister of Foreign Affairs was adamant that he wanted to give the highest French official distinction, the Legion of Honour, to an American actor, Robert de Niro; a Spanish director, Pedro Almodovar and a French director, André Techiné. That is why I am pleased to underline a century of co-operation between our two film industries.

In 1896, Lumière's Cinematographe opened in Sydney, screening overseas productions. That same year the earliest moving picture shot and presented in Australia was made by Maurice Sestier, a roving employee of the Lumière brothers. In 1955, Charles Chauvel, a famous Australian director, presented at Cannes the first Australian colour feature, *Jedda*, which received important acclaim. This was the starting point of a significant Australian involvement at Cannes.

In conclusion, for the present time and the future, I call for a continuity and development of these very special links. I take great pleasure in opening this retrospective in Adelaide tonight, and wish it the best.

Thank you for your attention and please enjoy this evening.

The other eleven films screened were:

- La bataille du rail/ The Battle of the Rails* (1945)
- Les vacances de M. Hulot/ Monsieur Hulot's Holidays* (1953)
- Un homme et une femme/ A Man and a Woman* (1966)
- Les choses de la vie/ The Things of Life* (1970)
- Le dossier 51/ File 51* (1979)
- Un dimanche à la campagne/ A Sunday in the Country* (1984)
- Thérèse* (1986)
- Cyrano de Bergerac* (1990)
- Van Gogh* (1991)
- Ma saison préférée/ My Favourite Season* (1993)
- Ridicule* (1996)

The Editorial Committee is most grateful to M. Mouchel-Blaisot for the text of his speech and to the Alliance Française of Adelaide for details of the Retrospective.