

What gave you the idea to start a French-language film festival in the Greenwich area?

In 2003, amidst misunderstandings between France and the U.S. over foreign policy issues, it was imperative to create opportunities for dialogue. We needed a powerful tool to achieve this goal: it had to be sharp and universal to reach a large audience. Cinema was this tool, and French cinema has plenty to offer. It was also important to present movies from throughout the French-speaking world, because French culture is more than France. A festival here in our community was the obvious answer, offering a wide choice of movies and a forum for dialogue.

Tell us a little about that first festival in 2005.

We started from scratch, with no money, a few contacts, and some strong beliefs: we wanted to show quality and diversity, explore new themes, discover new promising talents, and expose the public to actors and directors. Philippe Muyl and Coline Serreau were the first who trusted in our adventure. In 2005, we began with 7 movies, some on DVD and a few in 35mm, with 800 spectators. Seeing the standing ovation following Coline Serreau's powerful film *Chaos*, I knew that we had started something with the potential to touch people.

What are some favorite moments from the festival over the years?

After more than 120 films over 10 years, there have been many magical moments: Claude Brasseur, who shared the best parts of his long career like an old friend; Jocelyn Quivrin, gone too early, who courageously presented the controversial film *99 Francs*; There was the thrill of students sharing a conversation with Jalil Lespert, and the generosity of Sophie Marceau during her Q&A. Finally, I think of a spectator saying to opera singer Natalie Dessay following *Becoming Traviata*, "I'll never see opera the same way after I've heard you speak here today." These are the rewards I keep in my heart.

Do you think French and francophone cinema has changed over the last decade? What are the prevalent trends today?

I feel a real continuity in French cinema: an intimate view of society, a capacity for self-reflection, but the themes do change: immigration, integration, coming of age, gender, unemployment. Perhaps the biggest change, though, is the passage from 35mm to digital: less expensive, faster to edit, it is more accessible to young directors. We see an emergence of gifted directors and actors, 2nd and 3rd generation immigrants: it is important to hear what they have to say. I also see a remarkable surge of talent in animated movies.

Has working in and around the medium of cinema changed your worldview in any way? If so, how?

Cinema has captivated me with its immediacy, its capacity to take us anywhere in the world, the way it pushes us to understand, to get closer, to analyze, to share. The people I've met along the way have also changed my view: actors and directors, producers and distributors, all in love with their work, all artisans committed to the justesse of their message: it is humbling!

I understand you are doing research for an historical television project. Can you tell us a little about it?

It is a project that reveals deep links between France and the U.S. I have always been intrigued by the process of film production. I am happy to lift up the veil and to participate in a way that brings these pictures alive.



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