

The Alliance Française French Film Festival Patrons Reveal Their Top Picks of the Programme

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The Alliance Française French Film Festival is honoured to have New Zealand actress Antonia Prebble and renowned film critic Peter Calder as Festival Patrons for the 11th edition of the event. With the full programme launch only a week away on 2 February, the Festival is delighted to reveal Peter and Antonia's picks from the 2017 line-up.

Antonia gained a passion for all things French while living in Paris, and following her sterling patronage of the 2016 Festival, returns to her role as a much valued patron this year.

“It is my great pleasure to be an ambassador for the Festival once again this year. Having watched a wide selection of films from the programme I can confidently say that French cinema is alive and well.”

Of the more than 30 feature films screening in the 2017 Alliance Française French Film Festival, Antonia Prebble has selected *The Unknown Girl* (*La fille inconnue*) by the Dardenne brothers, and *The Odyssey* (*L'Odyssee*) by Jérôme Salle. Her notes appear below.

The Unknown Girl

“*La fille inconnue* is a simple yet sophisticated film that follows a young doctor who is haunted by the death of a stranger that she feels she could have prevented.

The film is told in an unadorned manner, but what elevates this film is the stunning performance of lead actress Adèle Haenel. She is simultaneously raw and held – and always intelligent. She has a grace and humility to her that is quietly captivating and, as she is in almost every scene of the film, she serves to make the otherwise straightforward plot utterly compelling.”

The Odyssey

“The second film that I would recommend is *L'Odyssee*, a biopic that charts the life and career of Jacques Cousteau. Prior to seeing the film I knew only the bare facts about the legendary oceanographer.

Cousteau, the man, is revealed to be a complex individual whose unrelenting ambition makes life difficult for those close to him. His relationship with his wife (played by Audrey Tautou, one of my favourite French actresses) and his youngest son, Philippe, becomes

increasingly strained as Cousteau becomes more and more obsessed with conquering uncharted territories and maintaining his celebrated reputation.

...I came away feeling enriched from learning about the extraordinary life of this extraordinary individual and inspired to watch more of Cousteau's own films."

Peter's reputation as an esteemed film, theatre, and restaurant critic speaks to his talent and expertise in dissection, comprehension, and appreciation of art in all its mediums. Reflecting on French cinema, Peter Calder has many fond memories:

"I fell in love with Catherine Deneuve and the movies on the same day, when, still a teenager, I saw Buñuel's *Belle de jour*...

French cinema has been a staple of my moviegoing diet ever since, which seems fair enough, since France is where a movie was first screened, in March 1895 (the men behind it, Auguste and Louis Lumière, later decided it was a fad that would not catch on)."

Peter Calder's must-see films are both directed by the incredible Emmanuelle Bercot, who has been creating compelling work as an actor and director that the Festival is delighted to support.

Standing Tall

"The lustrous Deneuve features in one of my two picks as must-see films in this festival. In *La tête haute*, she's fierce and magnificent as a youth court magistrate who becomes something of a foster mum to a troubled teenager. The film, which scrupulously avoids the bland pieties to which the genre is prey, has a steely heart: it does not allow us, as an audience, to remain disengaged from the social problems it depicts. And it is fuelled by an awesome performance by 19-year-old Rod Paradot as the tormented adolescent."

150 Milligrams

"Fans of the irresistibly effervescent Danish actress Sidse Babett Knudsen, the central figure in the political drama *Borgen*, will enjoy her performance in *La fille de Brest*, which adapts a true story about a doctor in a provincial hospital who took on Big Pharma and the lumbering behemoth that is the French civil service."

The Alliance Française French Film Festival will run from 1 March - 12 April 2017 in 12 cities across New Zealand. For dates and venues information, visit www.frenchfilmfestival.co.nz

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