



Ambassador's Activities

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Speech by HE Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the 10th “My Favourite French Film” gala evening

London, 18 September 2013

Dear friends,

It's a pleasure for me to introduce this 10th "My Favourite French Film" gala evening, organized by "France in London". In this anniversary year, I'd like to pay tribute to the work done by Patricia Connell and her whole editorial team, but also to the extraordinary loyalty of the public, who have once again voted in huge numbers on the Internet for their favourite French films of 2012.

2012 was an exceptional year for French cinema, and for French films in the United Kingdom, which attracted very large audiences.

Indeed, 2012 set a record for French cinema, because the 63 French films chosen by British distributors attracted eight million cinema-goers in the UK: that's nearly three times as many as the previous year! And it's another record, because it brings French cinema's market share in the UK to 4.6%.

Thank you to our British friends who welcomed and appreciated French cinema: I'm thinking of the distributors, the journalists and of course – last but not least – the public! Let me add that the French gave British cinema a very warm welcome too, with the absolute box-office leader in France in 2012 being none other than Her Majesty's famous secret agent and his new adventures in *Skyfall*.

2012 was also an exceptional year worldwide for French cinema, in terms of both box-office success and awards at the festivals

With nearly 280 feature-length films produced last year, we French are very proud to be Europe's leading film producers (only just ahead of the UK, admittedly). Box-office hits abroad and cinema exports account for much of our cinema's success. In fact, of the 220 million tickets for French films sold worldwide in 2012, nearly 140 million – that is, nearly two-thirds – were sold outside France.

In addition to these very good figures, in 2012 French cinema also harvested prestigious awards at the world's top festivals: for example, *The Artist* by Michel Hazanavicius, which, after winning a BAFTA in the UK, scooped the Oscar for Best Picture. Likewise, *Rust and Bone* by Jacques Audiard, received the top prize barely a year ago at the London Film Festival.

2013 appears to have got off to a good start! Michael Haneke's *Amour* picked up the Oscar for best foreign language film and the Palme d'Or at Cannes was awarded to Abdellatif Kechiche's *Blue is the Warmest Colour*, which will be coming out in UK cinemas next month: one of the places you'll be able to watch it is in the Ciné Lumière at the *Institut français*.

The success of these French films wouldn't have been possible without the public's strong support for the culture industry. I'd most especially like to pay tribute to the work of the CNC in France and the BFI over here, without which far fewer films would be made in our two countries. Without this support, films such as *The Artist* and *Untouchable*, to name but two, would probably never have been made.

Commercial successes and our rich creative output fully justify the “cultural exception”, which we’re fighting for. It gives every country the right to support its artistic creation. We’ll be debating the issue on Monday 7 October in the auditorium of the *Institut français* Ciné Lumière at a meeting with journalist and TV executive Pierre Lescure and Jean-Paul Salomé, a great director who became President of Unifrance films a few months ago.

Alongside French directors such as Michel Hazanavicius, many other directors outside France have shown their support for the cultural exception. I’m thinking particularly of David Lynch, who said recently that if the flame of cinema were to burn out one day, the last country where it would still be burning is France. Personally, I’m convinced that the UK would also be spearheading efforts, with us, to save that flame... Fortunately, I don’t think it’s about to go out just yet.

On that note, dear friends, I wish you all a pleasant evening!