



CHESTER FILM SOCIETY PRESENTS:

PARIS, JE T'AIME

2006 FRANCE 120 MINUTES

Directed by 18 directors

Starring Juliette Binoche, Bob Hoskins, Rufus Sewell; et al

Paris, the world-renowned city of love. Paris, Je T'Aime brings together 18 short films by a host of international directors who offer their reflections on passion and romance, as felt in the hearts of different generations, races and genders.

Ah, l'amour. you can smell it in the air, along with freshly baked croissants and uncorked vin rouge, every time you walk down the streets of Paris... or so the tourist ads tell us. But Paris' faith in itself as the city of love is more than just a selling-point for weekend breaks. It is somehow bound up in the spirit of the place. When Paris comes to the movies — in *Amélie*, *Moulin Rouge!*, *Before Sunset*, *À Bout De Souffle*, *Subway* and even *The Aristocats* — the heart always rules the head.

Each of the five-minute meditations that form this cinematic love letter to Paris approaches its subject from a different angle, using a different district of the city as its starting point. Where else would Gus Van Sant set a gay encounter but in Le Marais? Why would Bob Hoskins search anywhere other than the neon porn shops of Pigalle to spice up his relationship with Fanny Ardant? And yet the city's most recognisable tourist attractions aren't central to the stories — they're relegated to background glimpses or postcard-pretty shots which act as buffers between the individual shorts. The love theme concentrates on people rather than places.

The various casts and crews are as internationally diverse as the multi-ethnic city they are depicting. Also, unlike regular three-or-four-section portmanteau movies, there's enough variation in tone to hold the audience's attention over a two-hour period. The frivolity of a mime artist in love sits next to the heartache of a mother who lost a child. Just when it seems a bit talky, along come the Coen brothers with a touch of comedy, as Steve Buscemi becomes the unwitting man-in-the-middle of a lovers' tiff in the Tuileries métro station.

Christopher Doyle's glide through the Asian beauty salons of Porte de Choisy and Vincenzo Natali's hyper-real vampire tale in *Quartier De La Madeleine* (starring an easily seduced Elijah Wood) are weak in terms of narrative but add a visual beauty to the whole.

If there's a drawback to the 18-segment structure, it's that it risks yanking the audience out of a story just as it gets going. Fortunately, the cumulative effect of the piece is strong enough to overcome any stumbles. Indeed, a handful of these films don't require a single additional frame. In *Loin Du 16ème*, Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas follow a young immigrant (Catalina Sandino Moreno) as she leaves her baby behind in the scruffy suburbs to cross the city and work as a nanny for a faceless career woman. Urban geography and social class are bridged by a simple lullaby.

Quartier Latin, meanwhile, is a masterclass in undemonstrative acting by Cassavetes veterans Gena Rowlands and Ben Gazzara, who play an elderly, soon-to-divorce couple discussing their younger lovers. Although directed by Gérard Depardieu and Frédéric Auburtin, this short's plaudits belong to Rowlands as screenwriter, as she compresses entire lives into a few brief lines of dialogue. It sits comfortably in the penultimate slot, its reflective mood drawing a succession of slices of life towards closure. Inevitably some of these segments are more rewarding than others, but the film as a whole is more than the sum of its parts.

Verdict

Love is here in all of its many guises, brought together with a touch of subtitled sophistication.

Alan Morrison
Empire Magazine

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PLEASE LEAVE ANY COMMENTS ABOUT THIS FILM ON THE REVERSE OF THIS FORM. MANY THANKS.

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TERRIBLE FANTASTIC