

French Film Fest brings the crème de la crème

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As it prepares to celebrate 30 years, Cork French Film Festival remains very much a key Cork cultural institution.

With its record of bringing France's biggest and best feature lengths Leaside, the festival has had visits from the likes of Yann Arthus-Bertrand and Sandrine Bonnaire in recent years, with films exploring love, freedom, religion and more, as well as panel discussions and even chocolate tasting events.

Overseen for the first time this year by new Director of Alliance Française de Cork Jean-Christophe Trentinella, the festival has seen its support remain steady through its history, backed by the likes of Cork City Council, CIT and local businesses large and small.

And it's not just Corkonians that revel in the week long marathon, which takes place from 3-10 March this year. More than 1,000 French people live in Cork city alone, the

second highest French population behind Dublin, meaning that as well as feeding a Cork cohort hungry for cultural enrichment (many of the festival's more popular screenings sell out every year), it has offered a regular home-away-from-home for 'la francophonie à Cork'.

This year celebrates 30 years of the festival and embraces the theme of 'ensemble' (unity or togetherness), aiming to promote stronger ties between Ireland and France in the wake of the impending Brexit shake-up.

With 20 films on offer, totalling a combined 40 nominations for the 2019 Cesar Awards Ceremony, France's most prestigious film awards, it's an unmissable week in the calendar those looking for the best choice of France's most hotly rated

current films.

"When people think of French cinema, they often think of glamour," explains Jean-Christophe Trentinella. "While that element is there, we wanted to go a bit deeper this year, which is why we chose the theme of

togetherness. Ireland and France are very much connected on many levels, economically and culturally, and part of the DNA of the Alliance Française is to foster relationships between our countries, as we have done for 71 years in Cork."

Among the subjects explored in this year's festival are social struggles - job loss, immigration, having children - common themes affecting not just French and Irish people, but those of all nationalities.

Indeed, universal themes appear to be a hallmark of this year's event, with a collaborative project with the Cork Environmental Forum on forestry and the environment also among the offerings.

"Most of the problems we face collectively come from a sense of disconnection," Jean-Christophe says. "The idea with this year's films was to show the lives of people, the hopes, dreams and challenges they have. To walk a mile in someone else's shoes. To understand them better and foster a togetherness. And that is really the

great function of cinema - we as a species learn through stories that we hear, learn how to make sense of our lives and understand the difficulties of life."

"It's about looking at all the complexities of human life. Of course, it's not a totally comprehensive view, but it's a glimpse at the different lives of others. We may all be different, but we all experience the same feelings - sadness, joy, etc."

The 2019 festival kicks off on Sunday 3 March with recent box office hit

'Sink Or Swim' ('Le Grand Bain'), a comedy telling the adventures of an all-male synchronised swimming team in existential crisis. Other featured films include 'The Quest of Alain Ducasse' about the Michelin-star-winning chef, which will be accompanied by a wine and light dinner treat for guests ("How can you watch a film about food without having food?!" Jean-Christophe exclaims) and closing film 'Cyrano de Bergerac', starring Gérard Depardieu as a romantic poet cursed by an

impossibly large nose.

There are also opportunities for people to meet and discuss this year's films, including a French-themed after party at The Friary pub on 9 March, and family-friendly showings.

"Cinema is a collective experience, so we've tried to create moments for people to mingle, exchange and talk," Jean-Christophe explains.

"French cinema has something about it which is very different from, say American cinema. You have an intimate view of the lives of people, rather than action, explosions and special effects. It's a different kind of cinema.

"Admittedly, when we try to do something with more action and explosions, we don't do it so well..." he laughs: "we'd better leave that to the Americans!"

The Cork French Film Festival runs from 3-10 March. Tickets for the films are available from the Gate Cinema website corkcinemas.com. To view the full programme go to corkfrenchfilmfestival.com.



Director of Alliance Française de Cork Jean-Christophe Trentinella, An Taoiseach and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Simon Coveney, Professor Grace Neville, Vice President of the Board of the Alliance Française de Cork and UCC Professor Emerita