

## Document Citation

Title	<b>Bon anniversaire, Jean Renoir</b>
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Pacific Film Archive</i>
Date	
Type	press release
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	5
Subjects	Renoir, Jean (1894-1979), Paris, France
Film Subjects	

# University Art Museum Pacific Film Archive

*Press Release*

Press contact:  
Shelley Diekman  
(510) 642-0365

University of California at Berkeley  
2625 Durant Avenue  
Berkeley, CA 94720

## **Bon Anniversaire, Jean Renoir**

A series of 30 films at Pacific Film Archive  
Thursday, November 3 through Sunday, December 18

Pacific Film Archive celebrates the 100th birthday of Jean Renoir, one of cinema's greatest directors, with a lovely retrospective series of 30 films, made from 1924 (Renoir's first solo directing effort, **La Fille de l'eau**, starring his wife, Catherine Hessling) to 1969 (the director's final film, **The Little Theater of Jean Renoir**).

The series begins Thursday, November 3 and runs through Sunday, December 18, and offers classic and rare films, with many beautiful prints from archives in France, Great Britain, and the U.S. A wonderful series highlight is a new, 35mm print of the delightful comedy, **The Crime of Monsieur Lange**; PFA will screen it on December 9, 10, and 11, following an engagement at the Castro Theatre in San Francisco from December 2 through 8. Among other series highlights are well-loved classics such as **Boudu Saved from Drowning**, **Grand Illusion**, **The Rules of the Game**, **The River**, **The Golden Coach** (starring Anna Magnani), **Elena and Her Men** (starring Ingrid Bergman), **Toni**, **La Chienne**, **La Marseillaise**, and **French Cancan**.

Director François Truffaut once said that Renoir "created the most alive films in the history of the cinema". Revered around the world by critics and fellow directors for the vibrant humanism of his films, Renoir has been called, by noted film critic David Thomson, "the greatest of directors. He justifies cinema."

Jean Renoir was born on September 15, 1894 in Montmartre, the youngest son of the painter Pierre Auguste Renoir. After military service in WWI in the cavalry and the air corps, Renoir turned to directing in 1924, intrigued by trick shots and screen magic, and wishing to showcase the beauty of his wife, Catherine Hessling (who had been his father's last model). PFA will screen, from this era, **La Fille de l'eau**, a drama set onboard a river barge; **Charleston**, featuring Hessling in a sensuous jazz dance; Renoir's adaptation of Hans Christian Andersen's **The Little Match Girl**; and **Nana**, based on Emile Zola's novel about a powerful courtesan. Two rare silents will be shown at PFA: **Le Bled**, a commissioned film set in Algeria, and the charming comedy **Tire au flanc**, a farce about a poet's service in the military that provided the incomparable Michel Simon with his first substantial screen role.

Renoir's first sound film, **On purge Bébé**, a farce about a manufacturer of unbreakable chamberpots and his constipated child, was made quickly and inexpensively, and proved to be a hit. Renoir, however, decided that he had been too influenced by American cinema. Renoir's subsequent 1930s films offer "a quintessentially French body of work...[that] include[s], by general consensus, some of the supreme masterpieces of world cinema." (--Philip Kemp, *World Film Directors*)

**La Chienne** stars Michel Simon as a henpecked bank clerk and amateur painter who falls in love with a young prostitute. (The film was re-made under the direction of Fritz Lang in the U.S. in 1945 as *Scarlet Street*.) Renoir filmed and recorded the sounds of Montmartre's streets, creating an original and memorable drama. The director's next film was **Night at the Crossroads\***, an atmospheric adaptation of a Georges Simenon mystery, starring Renoir's brother Pierre as Inspector Maigret.

**Boudu Saved from Drowning**, an utterly delightful comedy, stars Michel Simon as a *clochard* who throws himself into the Seine after his dog has wandered away. Rescued by a bookseller, Boudu is welcomed into his savior's bourgeois household, where he introduces a spirit of anarchy and havoc, seducing his rescuer's wife and flirting with his mistress. Renoir's subsequent comedy, **Chotard and Co.\***, details the transformation of a greengrocer's assistant into a famous poet. The film stars Fernand Chapin, best known as "Panisse" in Marcel Pagnol's Fanny trilogy. **Madame Bovary\*** was filmed on location in Normandy, creating a touching contrast between the natural beauty of its provincial setting and the suffocating boredom experienced by its heroine. **Toni**, a precursor of neo-realism, was shot in Provence as a production of Pagnol's studio. It depicts, using mostly non-professional actors, the romantic misfortune of a young immigrant worker.

Upon his return to Paris, Renoir was filled with enthusiasm about the progressive coalition, the Popular Front. **The Crime of Monsieur Lange**, one of Renoir's most vibrant comedies, celebrates collectivity. Written by poet and screenwriter Jacques Prévert, the film depicts an employees' cooperative that successfully publishes improbable tales about "Arizona Jim" in the Wild West. Set around an urban courtyard that is astir with life and humor, **The Crime of Monsieur Lange** is an enjoyable illustration of the vitality and good-natured humanism for which Renoir is justly celebrated. PFA (and San Francisco's Castro Theatre) will screen this film in a beautiful new 35mm print.

**La Vie est à nous/People of France**, was a collectively created essay film supporting the Communist Party on the eve of 1936 elections. It was banned by the censor, and shown only in membership film clubs; thought lost for some 30 years, it was rediscovered in 1969. **La Marseillaise** presents an intimate and stirring history of France's beloved Revolutionary anthem.

**A Day in the Country**, based on a story by Maupassant, was filmed along the river Loing. In only 37 minutes, Renoir creates an Impressionistic and very touching portrait of lost love. **The Lower Depths** is adapted from Maxim Gorky's play about social outcasts in 19th-century Russia, but avoids kitschy Russian details, giving a more universal backdrop for wonderful performances by Jean Gabin and Louis Jouvet. Gabin gives a subtle and riveting performance as a railroad conductor who becomes entangled in murderous jealousies in **La Bête Humaine**, adapted from an Emile Zola novel.

Two of Renoir's 1930s French films are considered to be among the finest ever made. In **Grand Illusion**, he depicts French prisoners of war during World War I, casting director Eric von Stroheim, whose films had impressed and influenced Renoir in the early days of his career, as a wounded German pilot in charge of the internment camp. As an officer and member of the aristocratic class forever changed by the war, von Stroheim's character finds a sympathetic friend in Boeldieu, an upper-class French flier (played by Pierre Fresnay). The film also features wonderful performances by Jean Gabin as a working-class French airman, and Marcel Dalio as a Jewish P.O.W. **Grand Illusion's** moving plea for peace indicts not only armed conflict, but also the barriers to understanding caused by nationality, race, religion, and class. **Rules of the Game**, a fluid, richly textured film that is Renoir's masterpiece, is regularly chosen as one of the greatest films of all time. The story of a weekend party at a country estate, **Rules of the Game** includes

---

\* These rare films will be presented in French, with detailed English synopses.

romantic intrigues among the guests and household help, a gruesome hunting expedition, a macabre masquerade ball, farce and bitter reality in a wise and subtle exploration of bourgeois society poised (in 1939) on the edge of disaster. Its premiere was also disastrous. **Rules of the Game** was reviled for being unpatriotic, frivolous, and messy, and soon was banned; the negative was destroyed by WWII bombs, and the film was not restored to its original length until 1956.

Renoir left France in 1940, arriving in Southern California in January of 1941. His relationships with Hollywood studios were difficult and mutually unsatisfactory. **The Southerner**, which depicts a year in the life of a struggling farm family in Texas, is generally thought to be his best film of the war era. After World War II, Renoir was drawn to India to make his (and his cinematographer nephew Claude Renoir's) first Technicolor film, **The River**. The story of an English colonial family as seen through the eyes of a 14-year-old girl, the film intermingles the story of three girls infatuated with a wounded war veteran with lovely visual meditations on the beauty and traditions of India.

Renoir's next three films are sometimes called his "theater trilogy"; in each, a woman must choose from among three suitors. In **The Golden Coach**, Anna Magnani plays the star of a *commedia dell'arte* troupe traveling in 18th-century Peru. **French Cancan** pays tribute to Montmartre in the era of Pierre Auguste Renoir. Jean Gabin, in his fourth and final appearance for Renoir, is an impresario whose devotion to showbiz leads to the creation of the Moulin Rouge nightclub. The film's climactic 20-minute dance sequence is one of the most exuberant in all of cinema. In 1956, Renoir fulfilled a longtime desire to create a film with Ingrid Bergman. She gives a delightful performance in **Elena and Her Men** which, like **French Cancan**, is set in the *Belle Epoque*.

Renoir began to experiment with techniques borrowed from television -- using multiple, simultaneously filming cameras -- in his next film, **The Testament of Dr. Cordelier**. Jean-Louis Barrault stars in this updating of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, with the two sides of his personality representing the war between materialism and natural instincts. Raymond Durnat has written that the film, "made at the same time as Godard and Truffaut's first features, parallels many [New Wave] characteristics before they had fully developed. At 65, Renoir had become a contemporary of his grandchildren's generation." In **The Elusive Corporal**, Renoir updated the prison-camp setting of **Grand Illusion** to the Second World War, creating a wry farce about the escape attempts of his soldier hero.

**The Little Theater of Jean Renoir** consists of four episodes, each introduced by the director. At the end of the film, the players "line up and bow to the camera, which pulls back to show them framed in the proscenium arch of a toy theatre. It looks like a valedictory gesture, and so it proved; [**The Little Theatre...**] was Renoir's last film". (--Philip Kemp, *World Film Directors*) Jean Renoir died in Beverly Hills on February 12, 1979.

"Bon Anniversaire, Jean Renoir" is made possible through the Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Museum Collections Accessibility Initiative.

Screenings will be held in the George Gund Theater of the University Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, 2625 Durant Avenue (one half-block west of College Avenue) in Berkeley. General admission is \$5.50 for one program, and \$7 for double bills.

A complete series schedule is attached. For additional information, please telephone (510) 642-1412.

# # #

**Bon Anniversaire, Jean Renoir**

**Screenings at Pacific Film Archive**

2625 Durant Avenue,  
(one half-block west of College Avenue)  
Berkeley, CA 94720  
Telephone: (510) 642-1412

**Screening dates, times, titles (country,  
year of production)**

**Thursday, November 3**

**7:00 pm: Night at the Crossroads\***  
(France, 1932)

**8:30 pm: Jean Renoir, dir. by David  
Thompson (UK, 1993)**

**Sunday, November 6**

**8:00 pm: Le Bled** (France, 1929)

**Sunday, November 13**

**7:30 pm: Tire au Flanc** (France, 1928)

**9:15 pm: Chotard and Co.\*** (France, 1933)

**Saturday, November 19**

**5:30 pm: On Purge Bébé** (France, 1931)

**7 and 9:10 pm: La Bête humaine** (France,  
1938)

**Sunday, November 20**

**8:00 pm: Nana** (France, 1926)

**Sunday, November 27**

**8:00 pm: La Fille de l'eau, The Little  
Match Girl, and Charleston** Jon Mirsalis on  
Piano

**Friday, December 2**

**7:30 pm: La Chienne** (France, 1931)

**9:25 pm: Boudu Saved from Drowning**  
(France, 1932)

**Saturday, December 3**

**6 and 9:05 pm: Toni** (France, 1934)

**7:45 pm: La Vie est à nous** (France, 1936)

**Sunday, December 4**

**7:30 pm: Grand Illusion** (France, 1937)

**Thursday, December 8**

**7:00 pm: La Marseillaise** (France, 1937)

**Friday, December 9**

**7 and 9:30 pm: The Crime of M. Lange\*\***

(France, 1935) and **A Day in the Country**  
(France, 1936/46)

**Special Engagement! New 35mm Print!**

**Saturday, December 10**

**7 and 9:30 pm: The Crime of M. Lange  
and A Day in the Country**

**Sunday, December 11**

**5:30 pm: The Crime of M. Lange**

**7:15 pm: Madame Bovary** \*(France, 1934)

**Tuesday, December 13**

**7:00 pm: Grand Illusion** (France, 1937)

**Wednesday, December 14**

**7:00 pm: The River** (India, 1951)

**8:55 pm: The Southerner** (U.S., 1945)

**Thursday, December 15**

**7:00 pm: The Lower Depths** (France, 1936)

**8:50 pm: Rules of the Game** (France, 1939)

**Friday, December 16**

**7:00 pm: Elena and Her Men** (France,  
1956)

**8:55 pm: The Elusive Corporal** (France,  
1962)

**Saturday, December 17**

**7:00 pm: The Golden Coach** (France, Italy,  
UK, 1952)

**8:55 pm: French Cancan** (France, 1954)

**Sunday, December 18**

**5:30 pm: The Testament of Dr. Cordelier**  
(France, 1959)

**7:20 pm: The Little Theater of Jean  
Renoir** (France, 1969)

\* These rare films will be shown in French with  
English synopses.

\*\*The Crime of M. Lange also plays at the  
Castro Theatre in San Francisco, December 2  
through 8.

General admission to these screenings is  
\$5.50 for one program, and \$7.00 for double  
bills. For additional information, please  
telephone (510) 642-1412.

This series is made possible through the Lila  
Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund Museum  
Collections Accessibility Initiative.

## *Bon Anniversaire, Jean Renoir*

November 3, 6, 13, 19, 20, 27

December 2 through 4, 8 through 18

**"He is the greatest of directors. He justifies cinema."—David Thomson**

**"Where does theater begin? Where does life end?"—Anna Magnani in *The Golden Coach***

September 15 was the 100th anniversary of Jean Renoir's birth, and we celebrate with a major retrospective of his films, including rare prints from archives in France and the U.S.

In France, the Renoir centenary was celebrated by a retrospective mounted by the Cinémathèque Française, by an exhibition at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival, and by a special issue of *Cahiers du cinéma* in which contemporary filmmakers looked at each of Renoir's films and reviewed them anew. What amazes is the *freshness* of these responses to films made between 1924 and 1971. Renoir continues to stimulate, to surprise. According to *Cahiers*, he remains "*le patron du cinéma français...There is a little bit of Renoir that sleeps in all of us.*"

It was not always thus. Only with *Grand Illusion*, in 1937, did Renoir achieve international acclaim, and that was already the peak of his finest period. Even then, *Rules of the Game*, today considered by many to be the best film ever made, met with disfavor in a country heading toward fascism. With the war, Renoir came to the United States (and Hollywood), eventually to become a naturalized citizen and make a second home in Los Angeles.

The *Cahiers du cinéma* critics of the fifties, who would become the filmmakers of the *nouvelle vague* in the sixties, saw in Jean Renoir not a *patron* but a soul mate; not a "father," perhaps, but a brother, whose work was sparked by an individual creative genius and was thus singularly set apart from the "well-made films" of the thirties and forties that the New Wave rejected. As late as 1971, François Truffaut wrote, "Renoir's work has always been guided by a philosophy of life which expresses itself with the aid of something much like a trade secret: *sympathy*. It is thanks to this sympathy that Renoir has succeeded in creating the most alive films in the history of the cinema, films which still breathe forty years after they were made."

The second son of the painter Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Jean Renoir said of his father's work, "It was a cry of love for the world where he was living—he didn't believe he was creating anything but was copying, copying things he loved." Like his father, Jean Renoir was infatuated with reality—not realism, but reality, with its many layers, and its magic. "I'm trying to discover *people*," he said of his own endeavor. Renoir's films are not loved because they are perfect, but precisely because they are not. And because they reveal so much about the process of being alive, there is a sense of improvisation to his craft, and always a sense of hope. Thus could Truffaut write about the tragicomic *Rules of the Game*, "For an instant we think to ourselves, 'I'll come back tomorrow and see if it all turns out the same way.'" Presentation of *Bon Anniversaire, Jean Renoir* at PFA is made possible by the following institutions and individuals who have loaned special prints for the exhibition: Cinémathèque Française, Electric Pictures, George Eastman House, Les Films du Jeudi, The Museum of Modern Art, Omnibus TV/ BBC, David Packard, and UCLA Film and Television Archive. For their collaboration, we wish to thank Laurence Kardish, Film Curator, The Museum of Modern Art; and Anita Monga, Castro Theater. And for their support, we thank Jean-Pierre Filiu, Cultural Attaché, Consulate General of France, San Francisco; and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.