

The 12th Annual Robert Classic French Film Festival Runs Virtually From July 17-23

by Marla Stoker Ballenger
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ST. LOUIS - The 12th Annual Robert Classic French Film Festival — presented by TV5MONDE, sponsored by the Jane M. & Bruce P. Robert Charitable Foundation, and produced by [Cinema St. Louis](#) (CSL) — celebrates St. Louis' Gallic heritage and France's extraordinary cinematic legacy.

Because of the Covid-19 health crisis, the fest will be presented virtually this year. CSL is partnering with Eventive, which also handles our ticketing, to present the Virtual Festival. Films will be available to view on demand anytime from July 17-23. Access to programs is limited to Missouri and Illinois. Once a ticket-holder begins watching a program, access to it remains available for 24 hours.

Regrettably, streaming rights to most of the films we planned to feature at the 2020 Robert Classic French Film Festival were not available to us. But CSL is pleased that we're able to offer a trio of works from the original lineup: Marguerite Duras' rarely seen "India Song"; a new restoration of Jacqueline Audry's "Olivia"; and René Clément's "Rider on the Rain," which is part of our year-long Golden Anniversaries programming that features films from 1970. All films are in French with English subtitles.

Although the films will be presented virtually, the programs will still feature recorded introductions by and post-film discussions with film or French scholars and critics.

TV5MONDE serves as the fest's presenting sponsor, and the Jane M. & Bruce P. Robert Charitable Foundation is the event's title sponsor. The fest's other sponsors are the Alliance Française de Saint Louis, American Association of Teachers of French, Arts & Education Council, Centre Francophone at Webster University, Les Amis, Missouri Arts Council, Regional Arts Commission, Washington University's Film & Media Studies, and Webster University Film Series.

Films

Olivia

Jacqueline Audry, 1951, 96 min., B&W, new restoration

A remarkable work by Jacqueline Audry (1908-77), one of France's groundbreaking female filmmakers, "Olivia" deserves rediscovery after being neglected for almost 70 years. Plunging the viewer — and the main character — into a true lion's den, Audry depicts a 19th-century boarding school for young girls. The two mistresses of the house, Miss Julie (Edwige Feuillere) and Miss Cara (Simone Simon), are engaged in a turf war — and a war of the heart. Competing for the affections of their students, they rouse passion, hatred, and unexpected reversals of loyalties. Although "Olivia" does not

address female homosexuality directly, the film sensitively explores the students' discovery of love and attraction. *With an introduction and post-film discussion by Cait Lore, film critic for Cinema St. Louis' The Lens.*

India Song

Marguerite Duras, 1975, 120 min., color

Associated with both the *nouveau roman* literary and the Left Bank film movements, Marguerite Duras was a versatile polymath who worked as a novelist, playwright, essayist, short-story writer, screenwriter, and film director. From a cinematic perspective, Duras' best-known work is her screenplay for Alain Resnais' "Hiroshima, mon amour," but she also directed more than a dozen of her own features. Because Duras' films remain difficult to access in the U.S., the Classic French Film Festival is especially pleased to offer what many consider her masterpiece, "India Song." Based on an unproduced play that adapted her novel "Le Vice-consul," the film chronicles the discontent of the wife (Delphine Seyrig) of the French ambassador in 1930s India. Bored with her oppressive lifestyle, she compulsively sleeps with a series of men but refuses the advances of the entranced vice-consul of Lahore (Michael Lonsdale). *With an introduction and post-film discussion by Jean-Louis Pautrot, professor of French and international studies at Saint Louis University.*

Rider on the Rain/La Passager de La Pluie

René Clément, 1970, 118 min., color

René Clément — the legendary director of "Forbidden Games" and "Purple Noon" — delivers a stylish thriller starring screen legend Charles Bronson. When a beautiful young woman (Marlène Jobert) in the South of France is stalked and then assaulted by a mysterious masked assailant, she kills the man in self-defense and, in a moment of misjudgment, dumps his corpse over a cliff into the sea instead of calling the police. Trying to return to her life before the attack, her world is turned upside down when an American investigator (Bronson) shows up and, to her horror, seems to know everything about what she has done. "Rider on the Rain" is presented in the 118-minute French-language cut. *With an introduction and post-film discussion by Tom Stockman, editor of the We Are Movie Geeks website.*