

‘We’re not a festival for expats’: Alliance Française French Film Festival draws Australian audiences at scale

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'A Private Life' is one of the film's playing this year's AFFF.

The Alliance Française French Film Festival (AFFFF), generating close to 200,000 admissions annually, has become a key theatrical platform for French cinema in Australia and plays a role in how some local distributors approach acquisitions.

That's according to festival CEO Frédéric Alliod, who tells IF distributors will often seek his view on a title before acquiring it, with the potential for selection factoring into how they assess what to pay for ANZ rights.

AFFFF shares revenue with distributors, as opposed to paying a screening fee. This works due to the festival's national scale; it takes place in all capital cities and many regional hubs. Unlike a typical festival where a film may play two or three times, a top title may be played upwards of 274 times across the event.

"The added value we bring is all the P&A we put in promoting the festival," Alliod tells IF.

"We cannot possibly promote equally 38 films, but still, we're trying to promote all of them."

Now 37 years old, AFFFF will reach 18 cities and 40 cinemas across the country in 2026, with Alloid hopeful this year they will cross the 200K admissions threshold. By those metrics, it is among the largest festivals in the country, and the largest dedicated to French cinema outside France.

French-language cinema is one of the largest non-English language segments at the Australian box office, accounting for around 4.8 per cent of titles.

Alloid admits he doesn't fully know why, but there is clearly a strong Francophile audience in Australia, with the festival seeing "exponential" growth from 2010 onwards. Its audience profile is very specific: 77 per cent Australian and 73 per cent female.

"They are affluent. They like to travel. They love gastronomy, arts, lifestyle," he says. "We are a niche market, and of course, that's influential over the selection of the films."

Only around 8 per cent of its total audience is French, and then only maybe around double that French-speaking. "We are not a festival for expats," he says.

"This is why it's interesting for a distributor, because they know they are tapping into an Australian audience."

Alloid observes Australia is unique globally in having "a business" of culturally specific film festivals. He wonders if streaming platforms may have played a role in foreign cinema's popularity, noting the growing acceptance of watching subtitled content.

"VOD is not always the devil, because it gives access, diversity and it becomes much more acceptable for an audience to try new nationalities – not all American or their own national cinema."

What has further allowed the AFFFF to scale is the Alliance Française network across different states in Australia, which promotes French culture and language. Each organises their own festivals operationally, which means the festival is technically "many different festivals happening at the same time." Alloid's position was created two years ago to help streamline every event.



Frederic Alliod.

“They might adapt, because they know their markets – they know the context locally – but we provide the theme. We provide national sponsors, because we mutualise the cost. We bring national graphic design, and also try to make sure that everything is congruent,” he says.

Alliod says the festival is always a screenshot of what France produced in the past year, with a focus on quality and diversity. The festival 38-strong program has this year been led by titles such as Cédric Klapisch’s *La Venue De L’avenir (Colours Of Time)* and Johann Dionnet’s *Avignon (Rodrigue In Love)*.

“This year, I would say there is an overarching theme, which is travel, geographically speaking. We have a lot of films that happen in different countries, in Egypt, Afghanistan, Morocco, Algeria,” Alliod says.

“It also happens that we have a theme of traveling through time. We have, for instance, a sci-fi movie called *Dog 51*, which is very rare – it’s an action thriller, we don’t produce a lot of these films. It was a box office success in France this year. [Then] traveling through the past, with period dramas like *Colours of Time*, *Jean Valjean*, *The Money Maker*, and also time-traveling comedy *Cycle of Time*.”

Alliod says the program is shaped by what resonates with Australian audiences, often leaning into recognisable elements of French culture, from costumes to settings.

“We play a little with cliches that people expect from us,” he says. “I would say we attract people with the cliches... but I think people stay because of the effect of surprise.

“The idea is for them to, once they’re there, try a few things which could be a bit more challenging; what they wouldn’t expect from France. Clearly, a film like *Alpha* by Julia Ducournau... is much more challenging than some of the films, like Jodie Foster in *A Private Life*, but it’s part also of the experience.”

Alliod says the festival is still trying to determine if it has more room to grow, or has reached the ideal size.

“Australia is such a big country, right? There are so many possible areas we could have the festival. Technically we are in every state, but we would be delighted to bring French cinema, French culture, French language to areas of Australia where they don’t have access to this kind of offer. So that is our wish, but we also have to be realistic.

“Right now, I would say it’s pretty satisfying. If I have a personal goal, we’ve been trying to reach 200,000 admissions for a very long time. Finger crossed it happens this year.”

Alliance Française French Film Festival runs until April 26 across Australia.