

Guess Who Got Shot in Paris?

By Julie Pecheur - May 1, 2006 - 8:00am.

By Rebecca Leffler

Lise Bouvier: Maybe Paris has a way of making people forget.

Jerry Mulligan: Paris? No. Not this city. It's too real and too beautiful to ever let you forget anything.

(An American in Paris, 1951)

Ever since the Lumière brothers picked up a camera, Paris—or its studio self—became synonymous with the big screen. Especially when it comes to romance. Think: Rick and Ilsa in *Casablanca* (1942), Gene Kelly and Leslie Caron in *An American in Paris* (1951), Louis Jourdan and Leslie Caron in *Gigi* (1958), Kevin Kline and Meg Ryan in *French Kiss* (1995), Diane Keaton and Jack Nicholson in *Something's Gotta Give* (2003)... Sharing a sweet embrace against a Parisian backdrop seems to be a rite of passage into celluloid immortality.

Homage to the City of Lights will be paid once again at this year's Cannes Film Festival with the premiere of *Paris, Je t'aime*, a series of shorts directed by 20 filmmakers from around the world. Each filmmaker was matched with one of Paris' 20 arrondissements to write and direct a five-minute film illustrating the timeless theme of romance. The stories were shot separately in both English and French, but woven together to create a coherent single narrative. Participating directors include such famous names as Joel and Ethan Coen, Olivier Assayas, Gus Van Sant, Isabel Coixet, Alexander Payne, Bruno Podalydès and Wes Craven. The casting credits read like a potpourri of the world's most beloved actors: Gérard and Julie Depardieu, Nick Nolte, Emily Mortimer, Natalie Portman, Juliette Binoche, Elijah Wood, Willem Dafoe, Ludivine Sagnier and Maggie Gyllenhaal among others.

In recent years, Paris has welcomed an increasing number of film and television productions, both French and international. In 2005, the French capital hosted 662 film shoots, including feature films, shorts, TV movies and documentaries. On a typical day from May through August, between 10 and 15 films are on location in the Ile de France region.

It's not only about love; it's also about money. The French government takes its film-funding seriously and, though famous for protectionism in the past, has become more open to non-French productions in its territories. Through the Ile-de-France Film Commission, established in 2004, Paris is chasing after its share of this globalized industry.

With production costs rising at home, American producers are increasingly looking for less expensive locales.

Hollywood is willing to be caught. With production costs rising at home, American producers are increasingly looking for less expensive locales. The Commission offers companies financial and organizational aid (with restrictions, of course) to encourage the Ile de France region for filming and production. Subsidies, combined with the variety of French landscape and world-renowned technical skills, attract foreign producers.

As a result, Carrie Bradshaw followed her artist boyfriend to Paris in the series finale of *Sex & The City* and, had Ross not arrived in the nick of time, Rachel Green of the hit series *Friends* would probably be working at the just-renovated Louis Vuitton flagship store on the Champs Elysées. *ER* also brought its cast and crew here. This March, *The Sopranos* traveled to Paris, bringing an international dimension to the mafia drama.

Hollywood Cameras Zoom in on the Ile-de-France: *Sex & The City* in Paris © Paramount International Television/Rysher TPE

And that's not all. The Ile-de-France also welcomed major Hollywood productions such as Steven Spielberg's *Munich* (2005), Shaw Levy's *The Pink Panther* (2006), and Stephen Frears' *The Queen* (2006).

The French are not only courting Americans. In 2004, the Commission signed partnership agreements with the Italian, Spanish and German film commissions to create the Capital Regions for Cinema initiative to reinforce co-production opportunities.

The cinema has proven itself to be a significant advertising tool.

The French film industry, under the supervision of the Centre national de la cinématographie, is supported by a fund created from box office receipts generated by all films released in France. (Though ostensibly a threat to the French national box office, Hollywood features may actually have a positive financial impact on the Gallic film industry.) To receive money from this fund, productions must prove the film's artistic and economic merit and meet French employment goals.

The cinema has proven itself to be a significant advertising tool, with blockbusters like *Amélie* being seen all over the world. In fact, according to a recent Film Commission poll, 62% of tourists visiting France claim to have chosen the country for their vacation after seeing it in a movie. Tourism amounts to 7 % of the national economy, with Paris being the number one

destination in the world.

Cultural Minister Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres in January of last year invited representatives of France's principal museums to meet with film producers in an effort to help cinematic production spread French culture throughout the world. De Vabres urged the attendees to increase the number of film productions in national museums.

He was heard. The Château de Versailles welcomed Sofia Coppola with open arms last spring for her \$40 million plus production of *Marie Antoinette*. Coppola is not the first to feature Versailles on the big screen, but Pierre Arrizoli Clémentel, chief conservator at the Château, allowed Coppola to shoot in the chapel, the Salon d'Hercule and Hall of Mirrors in the main palace, as well as in the Petit Trianon, its gardens, and even the Queen's own wooden miniature theater.

To shoot *The Da Vinci Code*, which also premieres this month at Cannes, Ron Howard's team occupied the French capital from June through August of last summer—from the Louvre, to the Ritz Hôtel to the suburban Chateau de la Villette. Filming took place on Tuesdays and at night when the museum was closed to the public, with trailers parked all around the museum. The crew even brought its technical equipment directly into the hallway where the *Mona Lisa* hangs. (Tom Hanks allegedly stripped down for a costume change as "*La Joconde*" looked on.) "If a movie like *The Da Vinci Code* can be filmed in the Louvre, it's possible for any film to be shot in Paris," says Olivier-René Veillon, Executive Director of the Ile de France Film Commission.

As Jean Cocteau once said, "In Paris, everybody wants to be an actor; nobody is content to be a spectator." The latest actor is Paris itself, not just a background setting, but often a major part of the plot, a character in its own right.