



# TREASURES FROM THE YALE FILM ARCHIVE

AN ONGOING SERIES OF CLASSIC AND CONTEMPORARY FILMS PRESENTED IN 35MM BY THE YALE FILM STUDY CENTER

FRIDAY  
JANUARY 13, 2017  
7:00PM • WHITNEY  
HUMANITIES CENTER

PRESENTED WITH  
SUPPORT FROM  
PAUL L. JOSKOW  
'70 M.PHIL., '72 PH.D.

# THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE



Welcome to Belleville! Tonight only: a special performance of the swing sensation “Belleville Rendez-vous” by the renowned Triplets, featuring conductor Charles Trenet, guitarist Django Reinhardt, and dancers Josephine Baker and Fred Astaire!

We're in the 1930s, and the opening looks like a Max and Dave Fleischer cartoon: in black-and-white and with celebrity caricatures, extravagantly detailed movements, and surrealistic metamorphoses. The four-minute prologue turns out to have been a newsreel viewed in the 1950s by Madame Souza and her grandson Champion, who live on the outskirts of Paris. The film transforms into color and a more modern animation style, but the surrealism remains throughout: much of Sylvain Chomet's *THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE* feels like a dream.



Under Madame Souza's perpetual-whistling coaching, Champion (accompanied by his oversized and underappreciated dog Bruno) endures years of grueling bicycle training for the Tour de France, but unexpected events bring everyone across the ocean to the metropolis of Belleville—a hallucinatory amalgam of New York, Montreal, and Quebec City. Chomet satirizes America's preoccupation with food and drink: the mile-high skyscrapers are topped with liquor bottles, the bloated Statue of Liberty holds an ice cream cone and a hamburger, and almost everyone in Belleville is obese. The triplets (who, on the other hand, are emaciated) magically reappear, as quirky guardian angels. Although aged, they're full of delightful surprises: performing their signature nonsense-lyrics song with percussion produced by household appliances, using grenades to expel frogs from the river for *cuisses de grenouille*, and playing essential roles in the film's thrilling climax.

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY  
**SYLVAIN CHOMET** (2003) 78 MINS.  
DISTRIBUTED BY **SONY PICTURES CLASSICS**  
MUSIC BY **BENOIT CHAREST**  
ACADEMY AWARD NOMINATIONS FOR  
**BEST ANIMATED FEATURE** AND  
**BEST ORIGINAL SONG**

Chomet, born in 1963, worked in animation studios (including four months at Disney in 1997) and commercials before becoming well-known as a creator of French comic strips and graphic novels, most prominently collaborating with Nicolas de Crécy. His first film, the 25-minute *THE OLD LADY AND THE PIGEONS* (1997), received an Oscar nomination, and paved the way for his first feature, *TRIPLETS*, on which he devoted five years and spent \$8 million.

Chomet's influences include Disney's 101 *DALMATIANS* (1960), Buster Keaton, Charles Chaplin, and French surrealist cinema from *ENTR'ACTE* (René Clair and Francis Picabia, 1924) to *DELICATESSEN* (Marc Caro and Jean-Pierre Jeunet, 1991). Reigning above all is the spirit of Jacques Tati, evoked by the film's almost complete absence of dialogue, its intricate sound design, a poster of *LES VACANCES DE MONSIEUR HULOT* (1953) on the triplets' wall, and—most explicitly and self-reflexively—a slapstick bicycle scene from Tati's *JOUR DE FETE* (1949), which the triplets view on television.

*TRIPLETS* is a triumph of traditional hand-drawn cel animation. Chomet does utilize computer-generated imagery to enhance the painstakingly created, exquisite pen-and-ink characters and settings, and for the movements of automobiles, bicycles, and trains, but he has said: “CGI doesn't interest me; I like a pencil and a piece of paper... what I am really interested in is drawing caricature, how far you can push it, seeing if you can achieve something really strong, almost abstract.”

Despite what it owes to graphic novels and to other films, there's nothing quite like *THE TRIPLETS OF BELLEVILLE*—except perhaps Chomet's follow-up film, *THE ILLUSIONIST* (2006), based on an unproduced Tati screenplay and with a Tati lookalike as the central character. Roger Ebert called *TRIPLETS* “weird, creepy, eccentric, eerie, flaky, freaky, funky, grotesque, inscrutable, kinky, kooky, magical, oddball, spooky, uncanny, uncouth and unearthly.” *The New York Times*' A.O. Scott, proclaiming the film as one of the best of 2003, wrote that it is “by turns sweet and sinister, insouciant and grotesque, invitingly funny and forbiddingly dark... a tour de force of ink-washed, crosshatched mischief and unlikely sublimity.”

**DID YOU KNOW:** BEATRICE BONIFASSI PROVIDED THE VOICES FOR ALL THREE TRIPLETS ON “BELLEVILLE RENDEZ-VOUS,” COMPOSED BY HER THEN-HUSBAND BENOIT CHAREST.

**NEXT UP:** FLORIAN HENCKEL VON DONNERSMARCK'S REMARKABLE DEBUT FEATURE, **THE LIVES OF OTHERS** (2006), TELLS THE STORY OF AN EAST GERMAN STASI AGENT WHO BECOMES ENMESHED IN THE LIVES OF THOSE HE SPIES ON. SEE THE FILM IN 35MM, WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY PROFESSOR OF ENGLISH AND COMPARATIVE LITERATURE KATIE TRUMPENER, SCREENING ON **FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 3 AT 7:00 P.M.**