



**SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022: 78=**

# Céline and Julie Go Boating

No film has brought me more joy than *Céline and Julie Go Boating*. It's funny, playful, full of tiny details that you only notice on subsequent viewings. It's rather like a bedtime story invented on the spot; the teller doesn't have the faintest clue where it will end up at the beginning, but disparate elements gradually build up and intersect until, finally, the whole thing comes alive.

**David Heslin, *Sight and Sound*, Winter 2022-23**

Journey down the rabbit hole with Celine and Julie, as their curiously intertwined lives take them across Paris and the boundaries of reality. Jacques Rivette's fascination with time and the nature of cinema takes centre stage as we follow them. Freewheeling, funny and feminist, this is collective filmmaking full of magic that constantly questions what it is that we're really watching.

**Maggi Hurt, [bfi.org.uk](http://bfi.org.uk)**

*Céline and Julie* takes one through the looking-glass of Rivette's continuing preoccupation with paranoid obsession to discover what might happen if, instead of shrinking in inward alarm at the unknown, the victim were to open himself up and offer a joyous welcome to the mysterious happenings that assail him. This, of course, is precisely what the spectator does in a movie auditorium; and it is not by chance that almost every scene in *Céline and Julie* queries, in one way or another, some aspect of the movie-making and movie-going mystery. The opening sequence, for instance, is a compelling demonstration of how *mise-en-scène* can turn reality upside-down as, in a prosaic little Parisian garden, such prosaic elements as the wind rustling in the trees, the voices of children playing, and a cat stalking its unseen prey, can create the illusion that an act of magic has just occurred; and illusion, moreover, which survives everyday reality's insistent attempt to intrude by suggesting that the two girls are in fact merely playing a game they have often played before.

Subsequently, dissecting our illusion (while the girls become increasingly hooked by their illusion) through a series of allusions to every conceivable movie genre (*cinéma vérité* in Céline's meeting with her actor friends, the musical in her nightclub act, *film noir* in her flight from mysterious pursuers, escapist romance in her tales of exotic adventure, etc.), Rivette proceeds to a dazzling demonstration, with the film-within-the-film as both reference point and specimen, of how narrative can be fractured and conventions flouted without breaking the illusion provided the spectator's personal taste (the sweet) has persuaded him to a willing suspension of disbelief in the first place. And here, as Céline and Julie sit alternately entranced and bored by the 'movie' they have elected to see, the intriguing battery of signs, talismans and familiars that Rivette conjures to link them together – the proliferation of crimson hands, the moments of thought-transference, the mysterious cats that haunt their path – ensure that the spectator watching Céline and Julie remains hooked on the illusion that some mysterious correspondence has been evoked.

At the same time, the film describes a series of fascinatingly intricate arabesques around the quality of imagination that is necessary if filmmaker and spectator are to understand and get the best out of each other. Fundamentally, as Rivette acknowledges by his various references to children's books (capped by Madlyn's role as both the still centre and the way out of the film-within-the-film), as well as through his use of improvisation for Juliet Berto and Dominique Labourier (their childish spontaneity enables them to escape the vicious circle of hieratic despair), imagination is a childlike quality in that children – uninhibited by the weight of experience since they have no past to speak of and no conception of the future – are more likely than adults to let it run free.

Although, as Rivette has said, 'the film is something that happens to Julie' in that she is an eminently sensible character transformed by her meeting with the fantastical Céline, the transformation is really much more of a two-way process. For if Julie is weighed down by her past (with memories that are hardly rosy, to judge from the way she clings to the unprepossessing Guilou, as well as from Poupie's evocation of her wandering mother), Céline is equally shackled by her hopes for the future (illustrated by the absurd fantasies of fame and fortune she weaves at the slightest provocation).

Each girl systematically destroys the other's 'baggage' until, from an amalgamation of Julie's memory (the house) and Céline's fantasy (the sinister man and his two ladies), they share an experience (one might almost say an exorcism) from which they emerge in some sense purified (they are now indistinguishable, complementary aspects of each other) and with powers of imagination enriched to a point where they can accept illusion and reality on the same plane (the shot of the two boats tranquilly passing each other as though the borders between truth and fiction no longer existed). At which point, illustrating the gentle caveat at the beginning of the film – 'Most of the time it started like this...' – the film comes airily full circle to go through yet another looking glass. A timely reminder, in no way detracting from the seriousness of what Rivette has to say, that *Céline and Julie* is first and foremost a brilliant *jeu d'esprit* in which spectators who willingly suspend disbelief – as the punning French title notes that Céline and Julie do – find themselves embarked on a delightful voyage which blends the smiles of a summer afternoon with the mysteries of the haunted house in the secret garden.

**Tom Milne, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, August 1976**

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**CÉLINE AND JULIE GO BOATING  
(CÉLINE ET JULIE VONT EN BATEAU)**

*Director:* Jacques Rivette

*Production Company:* Films du Losange (Paris)

*In association with:* Action Films, Films Christian Fechner, Films 7, Renn Productions, Saga Production, Simar Films, V.M. Productions

*Producer:* Barbet Schroeder

*Assistant Directors:* Luc Béraud, Pascal Lemaître

*Continuity:* Irina Lhomme

*Scenario:* Juliet Berto, Dominique Labourier, Bulle Ogier, Marie-France Pisier, Jacques Rivette

*Dialogue:* Eduardo de Gregorio

*Film-within-film based on stories by:* Henry James

*Director of Photography:* Jacques Renard

*Assistant Photography:* Michel Cenet

*Stills:* Marilù Parolini

*Editor:* Nicole Lubtchansky

*Assistant Editor:* Cris Tullio Altan

*Make-up:* Ronaldo Abreu

*Hairstyles:* Dessanges

*Music/Songs:* Jean-Marie Sénia

*Sound Mixer:* Elvire Lerner

*Boom Operator:* Gilbert Pereira

*Sound Editor:* Paul Lainé

**Cast**

Juliet Berto (*Céline*)

Dominique Labourier (*Julie*)

Bulle Ogier (*Camille*)

Marie-France Pisier (*Sophie*)

Barbet Schroeder (*Olivier*)

Philippe Clévenot (*Guilou*)

Nathalie Asnar (*Madlyn*)

Marie-Thérèse Saussure (*Poupie*)

Jean Douchet (*M Dédé*)

Adèle Taffetas (*Alice*)

Anne Zamire (*Lil*)

Monique Clément (*Myrtille*)

Jérôme Richard (*Julien*)

Michael Graham (*Boris*)

Jean-Marie Sénia (*Cyrille*)

Jean-Claude Biette, Jean-Claude Romer,

Michel Caen (*spectators at cabaret*)

Jean Eustache, Jacques Bontemps (*readers at library*)

France 1974©

193 mins

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## SIGHT AND SOUND GREATEST FILMS OF ALL TIME 2022

### **Celine and Julie Go Boating (Céline et Julie vont en bateau)**

Sun 8 Jan 14:45; Sat 21 Jan 17:00

### **Journey to Italy (Viaggio in Italia)**

Sun 8 Jan 18:20; Mon 23 Jan 14:30; Fri 27 Jan 20:50

### **Parasite (Gisaengchung)**

Mon 9 Jan 17:50; Wed 18 Jan 17:30 BFI IMAX

### **Tropical Malady (Sud pralad)**

Mon 9 Jan 20:40

### **The Shining**

Tue 10 Jan 20:10; Sat 21 Jan 20:30 BFI IMAX

### **The Gleaners and I (Les glaneurs et la glaneuse) + La Jetée**

Wed 11 Jan 20:30; Mon 23 Jan 18:10

### **Black Girl (La Noire de...)**

Thu 12 Jan 18:15 (+ intro)

### **A Matter of Life and Death**

Thu 12 Jan 20:40; Sun 22 Jan 11:30

### **Chungking Express (Chung Him sam lam)**

Thu 12 Jan 20:45; Tue 17 Jan 20:50; Sat 21 Jan 14:15

### **Modern Times**

Fri 13 Jan 17:45; Sun 22 Jan 13:10

### **Metropolis**

Sun 15 Jan 14:40; Mon 30 Jan 16:30 BFI IMAX

### **Once Upon a Time in the West (C'era una volta il West)**

Sun 15 Jan 16:15 BFI IMAX

### **A Brighter Summer Day (Guling jie shaonian sha ren shijian)**

Mon 16 Jan 18:30; Sat 28 Jan 16:00

### **Ugetsu Monogatari**

Tue 17 Jan 20:30

### **Imitation of Life**

Wed 18 Jan 20:30; Wed 25 Jan 14:30; Sun 29 Jan 12:30

### **The Spirit of the Beehive (El espíritu de la colmena)**

Thu 19 Jan 18:00; Sat 28 Jan 13:50

### **Pierrot le Fou**

Thu 19 Jan 20:30

### **The Leopard (Il gattopardo)**

Fri 20 Jan 14:00

### **Sansho the Bailiff (Sansho Dayu)**

Fri 20 Jan 17:45; Thu 26 Jan 17:50

### **Madame de...**

Fri 20 Jan 18:10 (+ intro by Ruby McGuigan, Cultural Programme Manager)

### **Blue Velvet**

Fri 20 Jan 20:35; Tue 24 Jan 21:00 BFI IMAX

### **Sátántangó**

Sat 21 Jan 13:30

### **My Neighbour Totoro (Tonari no Totoro)**

Sun 22 Jan 10:00 BFI IMAX; Sat 28 Jan 13:40

### **Spirited Away (Sen to Chihiro no Kamikakushi)**

Sun 22 Jan 12:30 BFI IMAX

### **Yi Yi (A One and a Two...)**

Sun 22 Jan 14:00 (+ intro by Hyun Jin Cho, Film Programmer, BFI Festivals)

### **L'avventura (The Adventure)**

Sun 22 Jan 15:20; Mon 30 Jan 20:15

### **The Red Shoes**

Tue 24 Jan 18:05

### **Andrei Rublev**

Thu 26 Jan 18:40; Sun 29 Jan 17:20

### **Sunset Boulevard**

Fri 27 Jan 14:30; Mon 30 Jan 17:50

### **A Man Escaped (Un Condamné à mort s'est échappé)**

Sat 28 Jan 20:30

### **The General**

Sun 29 Jan 15:10

### **Touki-Bouki**

Tue 31 Jan 17:40

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