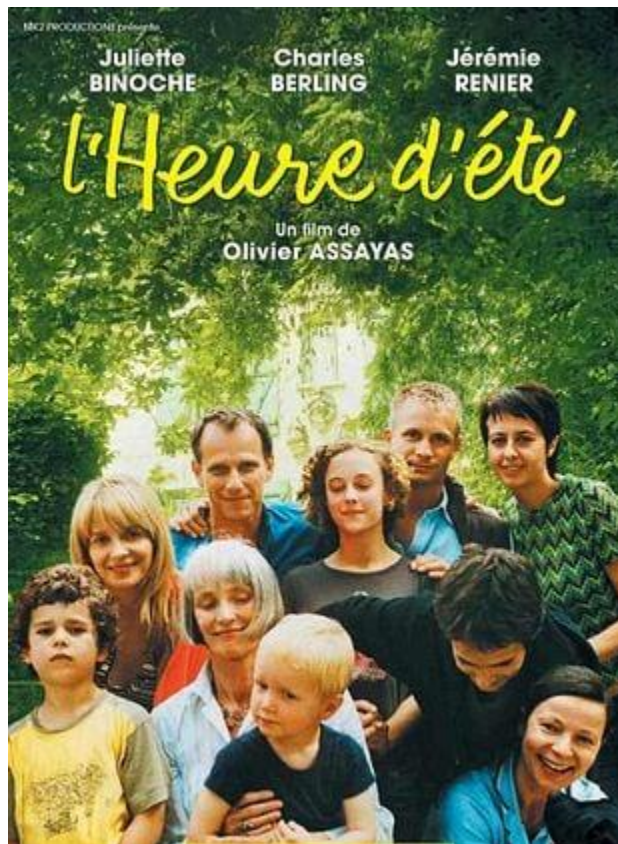




L'Heure d'été (*Summer Hours*) is a Summer 2026 LVCA dvd donation to the Ligonier Valley Library of Ligonier, Pennsylvania for its Classic Cinema Collection. Below is Kino Ken's review of that Criterion Collection dvd release.

18 of a possible 20 points = ****1/2 = a minor classic

France 2008 color 103 minutes subtitled live action feature drama
 MK2 Productions / France 3 Cinéma / Canal + / TPS Star / Le Musée d'Orsay /
 La Région Île-de-France / Soficinéma 3 / Centre national du cinema et de l'image
 animée (CNC) / Cofinova 4 Producers: Marin Karmitz, Nathanaël Karmitz,
 Charles Gillibert a Criterion Collection dvd release

Key: *indicates outstanding technical achievement or performance
 (j) designates a juvenile performer

Points:

2 Direction: Olivier Assayas*

- 2 Editing: Luc Barnier
- 2 Cinematography: Eric Gautier*
- 2 Lighting: François Berroir*
- Color Grading: Isabelle Julien*
- 2 Written by: Olivier Assayas
- Script Supervision: Clémentine Schaeffer
- 1 Music (non-original): Turlough O'Carolan, Robin Williamson, Mike Heron,
Katty Besnard
- 2 Art Direction: Fanny Stauff*
- Set Design: François-Renaud Labarthe*
- Set Decoration: Mauvezin Bosque Alexandrine*
- Costume Design: Anaïs Romand and Jurgen Doering
- Makeup: Céline Planchenault (key) and Lydia Pujois
- 1 Sound
- Sound Editing: Nicolas Cantin and Olivier Goinard
- Sound Recording: Nicolas Cantin
- Sound Mixing: Olivier Goinard
- Casting: Antoinette Boulat, Elsa Pharaon (children)
- 2 Acting
- 2 Creativity
- 18 total points

Cast: Juliette Binoche* (Adrienne), Charles Berling* (Frédéric), Jérémie Renier* (Jérémie), Edith Scob* (Hélène), Dominique Reymond (Lisa), Valérie Bonneton (Angela), Isabelle Sadoyan* (Éloïse), Kyle Eastwood (James), Alice de Lencquesaing (j) (Sylvie), Emile Berling (Pierre), Jean-Baptiste Malartre* (Michel Waldemar), Gilles Arbona* (Maître Lambert), Eric Elmosnino* (police commissioner), Marc Voinchet (radio presenter), Sara Martins (press attaché), Christian Lucas* (Éloïse's nephew), Philippe Paimblanc* (mayor of Valmondois), Luc Bricault (tourist in Musée d'Orsay), Arnaud Azoulay (Sylvie's little friend), Marine Decroix (j) and Léna Burger (j) (friends of Sylvie), François-Marie Banier (president of Foundations Commission), Philippe Thiébaud, Arnaud Brejon de la Lavergnée, Marc Plocki, Odile Michel (members of Foundations Commission), Michel Maket, Gérard Landrot, Michel Broomhead (experts), Marie Bélie Vaulet (Musée d'Orsay guide),

Bruno Écault (sculpture restorer), Daisy Kechichiglonian (j), Pearl Kechichiglonian (j), Max Ricat (j), Kauda Pharaon (j), Alistair Forwood (j), Malo Gledhill (j) (children)

Somewhat in the same autumnal atmosphere as Bertrand Tavernier's 1984 beauty *Une dimanche à la campagne* (*A Sunday in the Country*), Olivier Assayas's *L'heure d'été* (*The Summer Hours*) explores the question of what happens to works of art when their creator / custodian dies? How are they passed along to later generations? Does their significance change in that process?

Added reverberations stem from Assayas's own mother's passing away during the period his film was in production. That sense of lost security and home base dominates the character of Frédéric, who's deprived of both maternal advice and ancestral anchorage in the course of less than one year. His own attachment to decors and place is founded on a combination of nostalgia and functionality. He doesn't appreciate his great-uncle's art for its own sake. Yet he's reluctant to part with it. For the sketches represent fondly recollected scenes (and scenery) from his childhood. Coming into play also is a wish to use tribal relics as bonds connecting his own children with a preceding generation. However, neither daughter Sylvie nor son Pierre show any attraction to their great-uncle's supposed masterworks. For them, their grandmother's house is simply a convenient pastoral site for picnics and parties. These adolescents are incapable of building a bridge between their own time and that of the post-Impressionist painter revered by Grandmother Hélène. Much more intriguing to them is a family "secret" about their grandma's romantic attachment to her uncle. Scandal, indeed, seems especially alluring to Sylvie, who nonchalantly pursues drug use and a sexual relationship with her boyfriend, someone she adamantly even refuses to name for father Frédéric. She has no intention of currently introducing him socially to dad and will probably only most reluctantly do so in the future. Perhaps Sylvie regards bohemianism of forebears as adequate justification for her own behavior.

Frédéric's two younger siblings, sister Hélène and kid brother Jérémie, have removed themselves far from home turf, pursuing careers respectively in the United States and China. Even their native land of France means little to them. When the possibility of selling their birthplace arises, they vote to do so with no

regrets. Compelling an older brother to take the lion's share of responsibility for selling the manorial family house and its furnishings. Proceeds are to be split evenly among the three of them, nonetheless. Little real profit is likely, as the inheritance tax is bound to be enormous.

To minimize the French government's windfall, surviving adult Berthiers decide to gift Paris's Musee d'Orsay with what experts judge to be their most potentially valuable pieces of art. The process by which this occurs occupies a fairly large chunk of the film.

What might be termed the movie's final act concerns two removals: first, distribution and departure of collected art from the Berthier homestead and second, separation of family and housekeeper from a rambling souvenir of the past. While Adrienne's choice of a career as designer of utilitarian dishware may have been influenced by her maternal house's abundance of artworks, she has deliberately rejected old school Gallic patterns in favor of Scandinavian modernism. Jérémie promotes whatever is in highest demand at the moment, irrespective of any aesthetic value. Frédéric places utility and economy on a pedestal above beauty. Instincts that motivated Paul Berthier have been lost to them, despite their sharing of a common scenery.

Only Sylvie retains a link with older Berthiers. One forged in a mutual fondness for breaking rules and experimentation. Whether any lasting art will result is for futurity to determine.

Juliette Binoche is an admirable Hélène, independent and frank, searching for novelty in the New World rather than the old. Charles Berling fully realizes the personality of Frédéric, someone more comfortable around objects that can be manipulated than people who resist such rearrangement. Playing the youngest Berthier adult is Jérémie Renier, who first came to wide attention as teenage Igor in the Dardenne brothers' film *La promesse (The Promise)*. Here he's engagingly eager and amiable, a loving family man owing more allegiance to wife and three kids than to his progenitor. Edith Scob is fully invested in the character of Hélène, a wise and rather world-weary matriarch whose best hours are in the distant past. She's allowed her children freedom to go their own ways, realizing none, not even a designer daughter, are even remote copies of herself. All three are fully immersed in the present, something which holds her attention only superficially. Isabelle Sadoyan's housekeeper Eloise is underplayed splendidly, a completely loyal and perspicacious domestic whose

management skills and tact function as ideal complements to an otherwise lax, emotionally impulsive single-parent family. Dominique Reymond is persuasive as gently leading Lisa, who serves ably as companion to introspective husband Frédéric. Though she's equally disconnected from their wayward children. Christian Lucas deserves praise for his concerned and compassionate depiction of Eloise's cabby nephew and Jean-Baptiste Malartre excels as Michel Waldemar, judicious and sage appraiser on behalf of the Musee d'Orsay.

Eric Gautier's cinematography is endlessly kinetic, keeping what could have become a dry and lifeless stroll through art gallery treasures vital. His camera seldom lingers on speakers, choosing instead to roam around rooms and along roads, stone stairways, and museum hallways.

Art Director Fanny Stauff, set designer François-Renaud Labarthe, and Set Decorator Mauvezin Bosque Alexandrine combine manifest talents to create a country estate abounding in post-Romantic art. Though it barely seems lived in, since only two women occupy its sumptuous interiors, former co-residents having died or dispersed to other locales. The spaciousness of their focus house reflects relative freedom felt by inhabitants from restraints of nationalism, social convention, tradition, and economy. Viennese, Danish, and French motifs mingle in libertarian co-existence. Though remaining strictly post-Romantic in orientation, each and every collectible represents what was at least originally an excursion into novelty. Hours of research supported elegant final choices in furnishing the Berthier house with trappings bearing the same degree of correspondence to enclosing nature found in Frank Lloyd Wright's Building designs and Monet's residence at Giverny.

Lighting by François Berroir and color grading by Isabelle Julien result in optimal clarity throughout the film, alternating brightness of outdoor scenes with far more somber interiors as fall and winter intrude on spring and summer and vice versa during the course of events depicted.

Sound recording and mixing is certainly adequate. However, more field recordings of natural sounds to accompany exterior shots would have yielded better results.

Luc Barnier's editing keeps scenes lively and taut. It's ably supported by Olivier Assayas's screenplay which frequently leads to viewer inferences being made without direct statements.

A superior study of family dynamics and the role of art in life and culture, *Summer Hours* is a delightful excursion into collision between static past and onrushing future. Mature teens and adults should find it quite fascinating.

Bonus features of this Criterion Collection double-disc dvd release are a twenty-nine minute interview with director Olivier Assayas highlighting the influences of his mother's final days and his Hungarian maternal grandfather's artistic creations on the film's themes, a twenty-six minute 2008 documentary on the production of *Summer Hours* with sporadic commentary by Charles Berling, a fifty-one minute documentary directed by Olivier Goinart centered on the relationship between objects observed in the film and Paris's Musee d'Orsay, and an essay on the film by critic Kent Jones.