

## A CELEBRATION WITH MUSIC AND POETRY

For National French Week 2009, more than 200 students, teachers, and other Francophiles from the larger Los Angeles region participated in an evening of poetry and songs at Whittier College for its 13<sup>th</sup> Annual French Play.

Reputed theater director and actor André Nerman, performed *Le Poète Voyageur* and brought to the stage a dramatic montage of songs and poetry from the French repertoire. Nerman, playing a timid artist who had never dared leave his native village in Normandy, sets to travel the world with his backpack, accompanied by his guitar and the recollection of words and experiences left by his friends, poets, and singers. His long journey makes him travel through sea, air, and land, from Paris to New York, passing through Osaka, the Marquises, and California, before reaching home, without ever getting to the Oklahoma of his dreams. Back in his native France, he finally finds the courage to declare his love to the woman that led his footsteps through his internal quest. As the geographic and internal journey progresses, the audience finds itself propelled in territories investigated by poets like Charles Baudelaire, Blaise Cendrars, St John Perse, Arthur Rimbaud, but also composers and singers such as Charles Aznavour, Jacques Brel, Claude Nougaro, and Hugues Aufray.

Judging by the attention and the reaction of students to the lyrics and verses, it was clear that many of the students in the audience had familiarized themselves with the texts of poetry and songs. Indeed a number of teaching colleagues made good use of the texts that Nerman provided us. In preparation for the show, students in my classes presented in pairs a poem or song as well as its author, using questions I had given them. This led to quite elaborate presentations, including a live presentation (singing and playing the guitar) from our most talented students of *Sur un air de Banjo!*

This National French Week event would not have been possible without grants from the AATF and the Southern California Chapter, plus funding from the Cultural Center and the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Whittier College. The minimal fee of \$4 per seat assured that people came after having made their reservations and also covered remaining expenses. The event was advertised on the Internet on the Cultural Events page of the Los Angeles French Consulate, the Shannon Center Web site, and my personal Web site. It was also advertised through

the Southern California Chapter and the *Alliances françaises* mailing lists as well as local newspapers.

As always, I am thankful to our Theater Manager David Palmer, for his fine organization and for including for the last twelve years a French performance on his calendar of events. With just a few hours to prepare before the show, David Palmer with the help of two of our French speaking students, Caitlyn O'Connor and Lindy Blake, dealt beautifully with the lighting from a French script. I am indebted also to Operation Assistant Ron Maurer, for running the box office so smoothly and helping our guests who came from far. Many thanks also to Jayne Abrate, Amy Likover, Jacki Williams-Jones, Emmanuelle Rémy-Riley, and Emily Rogers, Joy Hoffman, and Luz Maria Galbreath (Cultural Center, Whittier College), Andy Wallis and all my other department colleagues. Thank you all for your invaluable support!

Lastly, I am very grateful to all the professors, students, and members of the Los Angeles community who keep on coming back to Whittier College for this annual celebration of National French Week! *Vive la Semaine du Français!*

Marie-Magdeleine Chirol  
Whittier College (CA)  
[mmchirol@whittier.edu]