

Summer Hours

L'Heure d'été

Cert 12 A France 2008 103 mins

Crew

Director	Olivier Assayas
Screenplay	Olivier Assayas
Cinematography	Éric Gautier
Editor	Luc Barnier
Art Director	François-Renaud Labarthe

Cast

Adrienne	Juliette Binoche
Frédéric	Charles Berling
Jérémie	Jérémie Renier
Hélène Berthier	Édith Scob
Lisa	Dominique Reymond
Angela	Valérie Bonneton
Éloïse	Isabelle Sadoyan
Sylvie	Alice de Lencquesaing

Synopsis

Three generations of the Malry family gather in a country house in a village north of Paris to celebrate the 75th birthday of grandmother Hélène, who reverted to her maiden name (Berthier) after the death of her husband and zealously guards the reputation of her beloved uncle Paul Berthier, a celebrated artist. Of her three children, only the eldest, Frédéric, a lecturer in economics, lives in France: he and his wife Lisa have two children, Sylvie and Pierre. His unmarried sister Adrienne lives and works in New York and is a successful designer. Their younger sibling Jérémie has been posted to China by his employer, a sportswear manufacturer; he and his wife Angela have three young children.

A few months later, the three siblings convene for Hélène's funeral and awkwardly begin discussing what to do with the house and Paul Berthier's valuable painting, furniture and ornaments collection. Frédéric assumes that everything will stay in the family, but Adrienne and Jérémie expect to spend their lives abroad and Jérémie needs cash to buy a house in Beijing.

Abridged from *Sight & Sound*, August 2008



Reviews

In the pleasingly rambling garden of a country house north of Paris, lecturer Frédéric (Charles Berling), New York-based designer Adrienne (Juliette Binoche) and Jérémie (Jérémie Renier), who toils profitably for a French sportswear company in Beijing, are gathered with partners and kids for a lunch to celebrate the seventy-fifth birthday of their widowed mother Hélène (Edith Scob). She's the proudly independent and protective keeper of the flame – and the valuable collected belongings – of her late uncle, a well-known artist, so when, months later, Hélène herself dies, the three siblings come together once more to decide what to do with the house, its coveted contents, and Hélène's faithful housekeeper Eloïse...

Assayas's most fully satisfying film for some while, this is a warm, wise drama about the tensions and mysteries of family life. With a seemingly loose but meticulously assembled narrative in the style of his earlier ensemble piece *Late August, Early September* it chronicles the interactions between the various characters with psychological subtlety and precision, even as it explores the changing roles played by art, property, work and blood-ties in an increasingly globalised world.

While never ignoring the grief death causes, Assayas refuses to sentimentalise; it's a film of deft, delicate nuances, particularly alert to the fact that everyone has not only his/her reasons but also, inevitably, secrets that will be borne to the grave. Perhaps the characters are finally a little too uniformly decent, but it would be churlish to bemoan the generosity of spirit in a film so beautifully performed, intelligently written and fluently directed.

Geoff Andrew *Time Out London* 17 July 2008

A new film from Olivier Assayas is always welcome, even if one can't shake the sense that this mercurial talent has been largely spinning his wheels since the delirious *Irma Vep* in 1996. Still, *Summer Hours* is pleasant enough, an airy Chekhovian miniature in which Charles Berling and Juliette Binoche play bourgeois siblings parcelling up the estate of their dead mother and the great artist she shackled up with. In his unobtrusive fashion, Assayas poses telling questions about the ways we lay our past to rest. A faithful old domestic clutches a cheap vase as a sentimental keepsake, while the uptight beneficiaries are reduced to peering at their legacy inside a glass case at the Musée D'Orsay. Outside town, the teenage granddaughter has the right idea. By rounding up her mates for an illicit, booze-fuelled wake at the family home, she alone manages to say goodbye in style.

Xan Brooks *The Guardian* 18 July 2008