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HOLIDAY HOT LIST

Bring on the Beaujolais

November 19, 2009 | Melissa Henderson

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The French government had to invent a holiday for it, but now it's taken on the patina of tradition. Every year at midnight on the third Thursday of November, wine aficionados worldwide race to crack open a bottle of Beaujolais Nouveau, the light, fruity red wine made in the Beaujolais region just south of Burgundy in France.

Today Francophiles will want to dust off their high school French and head to Hollywood's Roosevelt Hotel to join in the global toast at the Francophone Fest. The party will take over the first floor of the hotel, including the fountain lobby and the Blossom Ballroom, site of the first Academy Awards ceremony back in 1929.

Presented by the Francophone and French Chamber of Commerce of Los Angeles and Orange County (FCCLAOC), the event promises food, drink and entertainment from French-speaking countries. It's put on by event producers Selavi (for "c'est la vie") Productions, the outfit responsible for the exclusive local parties known as French Tuesdays.

The Quebec delegate to L.A., as well as the Belgian, Lebanese and French consuls from this region will also be on hand to represent their respective traditions while you bump elbows at the wine bar.

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"We want to create synergy between not only France but all Francophone cultures here in California," said Philippe Guionnet, president of the FCCLAOC. "We hope to make Los Angeles a melting pot of all our cultures."

Guionnet, 52, has worked in L.A. for a decade and hopes the newly minted FCCLAOC will boost tourism, trade and business between the U.S. and Francophone countries around the world.

"Take Lebanon, for example," Guionnet said. "It has been in turmoil for years, so people don't think of it as a place to vacation or to shoot a movie, but it is beautiful, with a landscape many people have not seen."

The entertainment lineup at the festival includes performances by Senegalese singer Amelie M'Baye, Polynesian musicians, Moroccan belly dancers, Afro-Caribbean dancers, and a Vietnamese fashion show.

Libations will be similarly international, showcasing beers from Belgium, wines from Lebanon, Morocco and France, and gastronomic delicacies from pretty much all over. For wine enthusiasts who, like wine critic Karen MacNeil, liken drinking Beaujolais to "eating cookie dough," the fest will also feature the earthier wines of France's Languedoc-Roussillon region.

Admission price doesn't include drinks and snacks, but Gilles Amsallem of Selavi says refreshments will be offered at "preferred prices" as low as \$7 for a glass of wine.

Doors open at 7 p.m., and the main stage entertainment runs until about 9:30 p.m. After that, it's dancing to the multi-ethnic beats of DJ Yuri until 2 a.m.

And though custom dictates that it's gauche to start drinking the Beaujolais even a minute before midnight, those who must can console themselves with the fact that it's got to be midnight somewhere.

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calendar@latimes.com

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Francophone Fest 2009

Where: Roosevelt Hotel, 7000 Hollywood Blvd., Hollywood

When: 7 p.m. to 2 a.m. today

Price: \$20 in advance, \$30 at the door

Contact: www.fcclaoc.com; www.selaviproductions.com

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