

French cinema's 'national treasure' Belmondo dies at 88



Actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, one of postwar French cinema's biggest stars whose charismatic smile lit up the screen for half a century, has died aged 88 at his Paris home, his family announced Monday. Belmondo, who first came to fame as part of the French New Wave cinema movement with films like "Breathless" by Jean-Luc Godard, went on to become a household name, acting in 80 films covering a multitude of genres, including comedies and thrillers. "He had been very tired for some time. He died peacefully," the family said in a statement sent to AFP by Belmondo's lawyer, Michel Godest. Belmondo, who was born on April 9, 1933 in the wealthy Paris suburb of Neuilly-sur-Seine, grew up in a family of

artists. His father was a well-known sculptor. Belmondo, who was bad at school but good at boxing, started his acting career in theatre before embarking on a film career that was to span half a century, with 130 million cinema tickets to his films sold. Known in France as "Bebel", Belmondo was also often called "Le Magnifique" (The Magnificent), after a 1970s secret agent satire in which he starred. "He will always be The Magnificent," President Emmanuel Macron tweeted. Calling Belmondo "a national treasure", Macron added: "We all recognized ourselves in him".

'Solar, talented... and so French'
Former president Francois Hollande

said that "everybody would have loved to be friends with him", while ex-premier Manuel Valls called Belmondo "magnificent, solar, talented ... and so French". Fellow iconic French actor Alain Delon—both a friend and a rival of Belmondo—said he was "completely crushed" by the news of Belmondo's death. French director Bertrand Blier said "it was so easy to film with Belmondo. It's always easy with great actors." French actor Richard Berry said of Belmondo that "he was everybody's friend" and Michel Boujenah, also a French actor, called him "our very own Eiffel Tower".

Spanish actor Antonio Banderas said that "this is a sad day for culture. A great actor and an icon of French and European cinema has left us". Many

others, including politicians, the French Foreign Legion and film fans the world over also paid homage to Belmondo on social media. "It's impossible not to feel that this is the end of an era," tweeted Uruguay's national film library. "The world is mourning a monument of film," wrote a fan in Italy, Peter Patti, also on Twitter. Apart from Godard, Belmondo also worked with famous French directors Francois Truffaut, Alain Resnais, Louis Malle and Jean-Pierre Melville. He later turned to film production, and returned to his first love, theatre.

Belmondo's acting career was cut short in 2001 when a stroke he suffered while on set left him handicapped. He won France's highest film prize, the Cesar, in 1988 for his role in "Itinerary

of a Spoiled Child"—which he didn't accept—and an honorary Cesar in 2017. Many of his films became international hits, and Time magazine in 1964 even declared Belmondo the face of modern France. He won several lifetime achievement awards, in 2010 from the Los Angeles Film Critics Association, in 2011 at the Cannes film festival, and in 2016 at the Venice festival. "His generosity, both as a man and as an actor, created some of film history's greatest moments," Cannes festival director Thierry Fremaux tweeted on Monday. "Thank you, Jean-Paul." — AFP

Belmondo's most memorable movies

From the cool thug roving the Champs-Elysees to a globe-trotting action man and swash-buckling adventurer, here are some of the most striking roles played by Jean-Paul Belmondo, who has died aged 88.

'Breathless' (1960)

In the Parisian love story that launched his career and the French New Wave internationally, Belmondo plays a petty crook who meets a grim end in an alley after falling for a young American girl.

'Leon Morin, Priest' (1961)

Donning a cassock and collar in Jean-Pierre Melville's World War II film noir, Belmondo shows gravitas and subtle sexual tension as a French priest in the grips of a moral dilemma during the Occupation.

'Cartouche' (1962)

Belmondo joins Jean Rochefort and Claudia Cardinale for Philippe de Broca's swashbuckling 18th-century romp about a gang of robbers that delighted audiences.

'Pierrot le fou' (1964)

With his blue-painted face and yellow explosives tied to his body, Belmondo stages a memorable art-house suicide in Jean-Luc Godard's experimental road trip. It charts a family man's disenchantment with modern life that prompts him to take off to the Mediterranean with the babysitter.

'That Man From Rio' (1964)

Excelling again as the action hero in this fast-paced Oscar-nominated James Bond spoof also by de Broca, Belmondo's jaunt to Brazil to see his fiancée turns into a mad-cap adventure to save her from kidnappers.

'Is Paris Burning?' (1966)

His only major role in an English-language film, Belmondo joins a host of Hollywood stars including Kirk Douglas and Orson Welles for this elaborate wartime epic about the liberation of Paris.

'Itinerary of a Lost Child' (1988)

Belmondo won a Cesar—a French Oscar—for his portrayal of a founding raised in a circus who loses his moral compass when he becomes a businessman in Claude Lelouch's saga on modern values. — AFP



In this file photo taken on February 11, 1964 French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo takes a picture of US actress Jean Seberg at the Billancourt Studios, as they just start the filming of "Backfire", directed by Jean Becker.



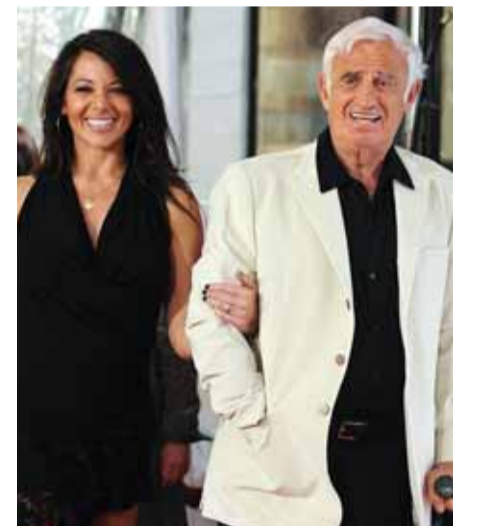
In this file photo French actor Jean Paul Belmondo attends the Monte-Carlo Million Dollar Super Four boxing event in Monaco.



In this file photo French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo (center), wearing a white "kepi" (flat-topped French military cap) of the French Foreign Legion, meets soldiers in Aubagne, southern France at the museum of the French Foreign Legion.



In this file photo French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo leaves the Armenian Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Paris during the funeral ceremony for French actor, screenwriter and director Charles Gerard, born Gerard Adjemian.



In this file photo taken on April 23, 2010 French actor Jean-Paul Belmondo arrives with his partner Barbara Gandolfi at the world premiere of the restored "A Star is born" during the opening Night Gala of the 2010 TCM Classic Film Festival in Hollywood, California.

France set for rare national tribute to film star Belmondo

France will this week pay film star Jean-Paul Belmondo the rare honor for an actor of a tribute at its national memorial site, the presidency said yesterday, as colleagues and public mourned the passing of one of the great icons of French cinema's golden age. Over six and a half million people in France watched special TV screenings of Belmondo films after his death was announced Monday, audiovisual data showed, as schedules were cleared for an actor whose swaggering smile and one-liners are inscribed in the national consciousness.

Fellow French film legend Brigitte Bardot, who starred with Belmondo in several movies including the 1961 "Famous Love Affairs", said in a statement to AFP

she felt "great grief" and was "thinking of him". "I feel great grief just like his dog Chipie who was his last and so faithful companion," said Bardot, who is now a prominent animal rights activists and from whose foundation Belmondo adopted the crossbreed dog Chipie abandoned by previous owners. "I miss him and I don't want to talk more about it. The greatest pains can only be expressed through silence," she said.



In this photo taken on September 14, 2010 French actor Alain Delon (right) puts his arm around fellow actor Jean-Paul Belmondo in Boulogne-Billancourt during the inauguration of the Paul Belmondo museum dedicated to the work of Jean-Paul Belmondo's father, in Boulogne-Billancourt, outside Paris.



In this file photograph taken on February 22, 1987, actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, one of France's biggest screen stars and a symbol of 1960s New Wave cinema, performs at The Marigny Theater in Paris, the part of Kean, written by French playwright Jean-Paul Sartre, adapted from Alexandre Dumas.

The office of President Emmanuel Macron said the national tribute to Belmondo would take place at the Invalides memorial complex in Paris on Thursday, an extremely rare honour for an actor although singer Charles Aznavour who appeared in several films was celebrated with such a homage when he died in 2018. "We have lost a guide," Jean Dujardin, one of the most prominent of the current generation of French actors, said on BFM TV. "He was a guide, Jean-Paul, someone who told us: Do not burden yourself with anxieties, have fun". Fellow iconic French actor Alain Delon—both a friend and a rival of Belmondo—said Monday he was "completely crushed" by the news of Belmondo's death. Even France's police force hailed an actor who starred in numerous crime thrillers such as the 1979 "Cop or Hood". "Even if it was just cinema you were in a way one of us, Mr Belmondo," the national police tweeted.

Belmondo, who first came to fame as part of the French New Wave cinema movement with films like "Breathless" by Jean-Luc Godard, went on to become a household name, acting in 80 films covering a multitude of genres, including comedies and thrillers. He died peacefully aged 88 at his Paris home, his family announced Monday. — AFP



In this file photo taken on April 4, 1996 french actor Jean-Paul Belmondo, one of France's biggest screen stars and a symbol of 1960s New Wave cinema, flips through his biography in Paris.—AFP photos