

2008 AFI FILM FESTIVAL BREAKDOWN PART 1



These are the films that I would recommend seeing at the 2008 AFI Fest. So if you cannot see them at the fest be on the look out for them. Or just Google the film's title with DVD or theater release and it should come up whether it is out or not. Some films no matter how great they are do not always get a distribution deal. I could go back to the 2007 AFI Fest and easily pick out 20 or more awesome films that you cannot watch at all. But what has happened is that the film festival circuit is really now about you can see at a festival as opposed to seeing a gem of an indie or foreign film before it becomes a nationwide or global hit. There is an immense amount of competition among all the top festivals to secure that blockbuster opening gala premiere and closing night gala premiere film. Even this year the AFI Fest originally announced that their opening film would be Jaime Foxx's and Robert Downing Jr.'s *The Soloist* which would have been great for AFI. But Paramount Pictures and Dreamworks suddenly yanked the release date from late November to April 2009.

Now my first question is why would a studio yank a film that possibly could have gotten Jaime and Robert Oscar nominations. I saw the trailer for *The Soloist* and it looked like one of those complicated personal drama about a white man helping broke mentally deficient black man become a success. Hollywood liberals love this type of flick and it totally escapes me why they moved the date of the film to the Spring 2009 when it will be buried and long forgotten by the time the 2009 Oscar Nominations are announced. But anyway *The Soloist* being pushed back meant that the AFI Fest used their back up selection for *Doubt* to open the festival.

Which is will no doubt, no pun intended, help *Doubt* possibly get Oscar nominations. Because the spotlight would have went to *The Soloist* and forced a lot of Academy voters to consider it for Best Picture and lead acting nominations for Jaime and Robert. So I have to conclude that ditching the prestige and tons of free publicity of being the 2008 AFI Fest's Opening Night film had more to do with not really wanting to get slammed by AFI Fest critics or a lukewarm reaction by Academy that generates no Oscar nods at all. And even worse a low box office from bad reviews which means a double loser for Paramount.



But overall I am again excited about the AFI Festival 2008. You can see all the films in Part 1, *24 City* to *Not Quite Hollywood*, I have selected as must see whether at the AFI Fest this year or later on when they are released in theaters, DVD or on cable. It is getting harder and harder in the U.S. to consistently see high quality indie films and foreign films other than between October and February. And you can forget it during summer. But that's why there are great film festivals like AFI Fest that can let one see a lot of great cinema and outstanding international and upcoming new actors and actresses.



24 CITY

ER SHI SI CHENG JI

Homage to Xstream

(China, 2008, 107 mins)

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Zhai Yongming, Signe Baumane, Jia Zjangke

Directed By: Jia Zhangke

Cast: Joan Chen, Zhao Tao, Chen Jianbin, Lu Liping

Producers: Jia zhang-ke, Shozo Ichiyama, Wang Hong

Executive Producers: Chow Keung, Ren Zhonglun, Tang Yong

Director of Photography: Yu Lik-wai, Wang Yu

Editors: Lin xudong, Kong Jinlei

Music: Lim Giong

Sound Design: Zhang Yang

Production Design: Liu Qiang

Jia Zhangke goes one (magnificent) step further in his idiosyncratic exploration of both the thin border between documentary and fiction and the self-imposed destruction experienced by China in her march toward a free-market economy. Though factories were once the temples in which socialism was built, with their workers treated as heroes, they are now being dismantled all over the country, and thousands of their employees laid off. Jia documents the closing of the “420” factory (once an airplane engine plant, with military implications) to build a luxury apartment complex, “24 City,” on its site, in Sichuan’s capital city of Chengdu. You see a sign being dragged over gravel, a building imploding as workers are singing “The Internationale”—but mostly you hear the stories, covering a 50-year period, of the people whose lives have revolved around the factory. Among unrehearsed interviews of real workers or ex-workers, Jia inserts staged vignettes: Joan Chen recounts her romantic loneliness as a Shanghai woman exiled in Chengdu; Lu Liping (*THE BLUE KITE*) remembers losing her little boy in the long trip from Shenyang. Zhao Tao (Jia’s muse) is an apparently cynical, ambitious young woman saddened by the fate of her aging working-class parents. This masterpiece sharply addresses the dilemmas of our changing times.

—Bérénice Reynaud



3 WOMEN

SE ZAN

Narrative Competition

(Iran, 2008, 94 mins)

In Farsi with English subtitles

35mm

US Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Naghmeh Samini, Manijeh Hekmat

Directed By: Manijeh Hekmat

Cast: Niki Karimi, Pegah Ahangarani, Babak Hamidian, Maryam Bubani, Reza Kianian, Atila Pesiani, Saber Abar, Shahrokh Forutnian, Nazanin Ahmadi

Producers: Manijeh Hekmat, Jalai Shamsian

Editor: Mostafa Khergheh Poush

Music: Heydar Sajedi

Director of Photography: Dariush Ayari

Sound Engineer: Parviz Abnar

Costume Designer: Zhila Mehrjui

Acclaimed Iranian filmmaker Manijeh Hekmat unfurls a beautifully paced, visually rich and emotionally insightful story about a family of three women. On a day that should be ordinary, Minoo, a museum rug conservator, sets out with her aging, senile mother to visit the doctor. Already distracted and fretting over her daughter Pegah, who's simply dropped out of college and stopped taking calls, Minoo's day completely deteriorates when she becomes embroiled in a professional battle over an antique rug. In the chaos, she loses both her mother and the rug. Minoo frantically searches Tehran for her family and the carpet, not knowing that Pegah has embarked on her own journey, camera in hand, through the Iranian countryside. Meanwhile, Minoo's mother, clinging tightly to the precious rug, chases down her own past. Anchored by Niki Karimi's stunning performance as Minoo, a lonely single mother struggling to balance familial responsibility, career and her own search for meaning, Hekmat's film is part road movie, part fable and part family drama. Touched with sublime beauty, humor and heartbreaking tenderness, her vision of Iran as a place of fiercely independent women and unfathomable depths is stirring and inspiring.

-- Maggie Mackay



ACHILLES AND THE TORTOISE

AKIRES TO KAME

World Cinema

(Japan, 2008, 119 mins)

35mm

US Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Takeshi Kitano

Directed By: Takeshi Kitano

Cast: Beat Takeshi, Kanako Higuchi, Yurei Yanagi, Kumiko Aso, Akira Nakao, Masatoh Ibu, Reo Yoshioka, Mariko Tstusui, Ren Ohsugi, Aya Enjouji, Eri Tokunaga, Nao Omori

Producers: Masayuki Mori, Takio Yoshida

Director of Photography: Katsumi Yanagijima

Editors: Takeshi Kitano, Yoshinori Ota

Music: Yuki Kajiura

Sound Design: Senji Horiuchi

Production Design: Norihiro Isoda

The West has no real analogue to Takeshi "Beat" Kitano. One of Japan's best-known celebrities, he has been a stand-up comic, TV personality, novelist, painter, academic and, as international film buffs know, a major film director. The fluidity he's demonstrated in his creative life is also echoed in his film work, which deals with shifting identities, self-construction and playful reinvention. He reinvented the yakuza (gangster) genre, adding surprising emotional depth and idiosyncratic tonal shifts to films including SONATINE and FIREWORKS before moving on to semiautobiographical works including KIDS RETURN. With ACHILLES, he completes a trilogy about the clash between artistic expression and societal constraint, between creativity and commerce. The story follows Machisu, who as a boy demonstrates a gift and passion for painting. As we trace his life—a teenager deep into his creations, a student wrestling with modern art, an adult, making a living painting reproductions in between working on his own pieces—we see the struggle of the individual against the soul-crushing realities of capitalism. Machisu loses everything, but keeps painting. He's left, as perhaps he prefers, alone with his art. But is it any good? And who's to judge? Kitano weaves together the comic and tragic, the absurd and the inspiring to tell a compelling story that richly resonates with his own life.



ACNE

Narrative Competition

(Uruguay , Argentina , Spain , Mexico, 2008, 87 mins)

In Spanish with English subtitles

35mm

US Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Federico Veiroj

Directed By: Federico Veiroj

Cast: Alejandro Tocar, Julia Catala, Gustavo Melnik, Belen Pouchan

Producer: Fernando Epstein

Executive Producer: Fernando Epstein

Director of Photography: Barbara Alvarez

Editor: Fernando Epstein

Sound Design: Catriel Vildosola

Production Designer: Gonzalo Delgado

Few films capture the pitfalls of growing up as simply and effectively as Federico Veiroj's heartfelt, beautifully crafted debut. A teenage rite-of-passage drama infused with comedy and raging hormones, ACNE vividly captures the tangled confusion of adolescence and ripeness of puberty. At 13, Rafa Bregman (Alejandro Tocar) is going through hard times: His bad skin, divorcing parents and the difficulties he has talking to girls are making growing up feel like an impossible task. He and his well-off family are part of the close-knit and at times suffocating Jewish community in Montevideo, Uruguay. Unlike most protagonists in teen comedies, Rafael has no trouble finding sex; in fact, he and his young friends already frequent the local brothel. But what Rafael desires most in the world money cannot buy—he wants romance and to finally kiss a girl. What makes ACNE special is its carefully crafted and utterly credible realization of place and character. Veiroj's skillfully woven narrative communicates with tremendous honesty the process of growing up, articulating with finesse the comical banter, shifting allegiances and cloying interdependence of its young characters. And he allows his young performers to simmer and marinate on screen, creating a bittersweet and at times excruciatingly real evocation of adolescence.

—Shaz Bennett



ADAM RESURRECTED

Special Screenings

(Germany , USA, 2008, 106 mins)

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Noah Stollman, Yoram Kaniuk

Directed By: Paul Schrader

Cast: Jeff Goldblum, Willem Dafoe, Derek Jacobi, Ayelet Zurer, Moritz Bleibtreu

Producers: Ehud Bleiberg, Werner Wirsing

Executive Producers: Ulf Israel, Marion Forster Bleiberg, Yoram Barzilai

Director of Photography: Sebastian Edschmid

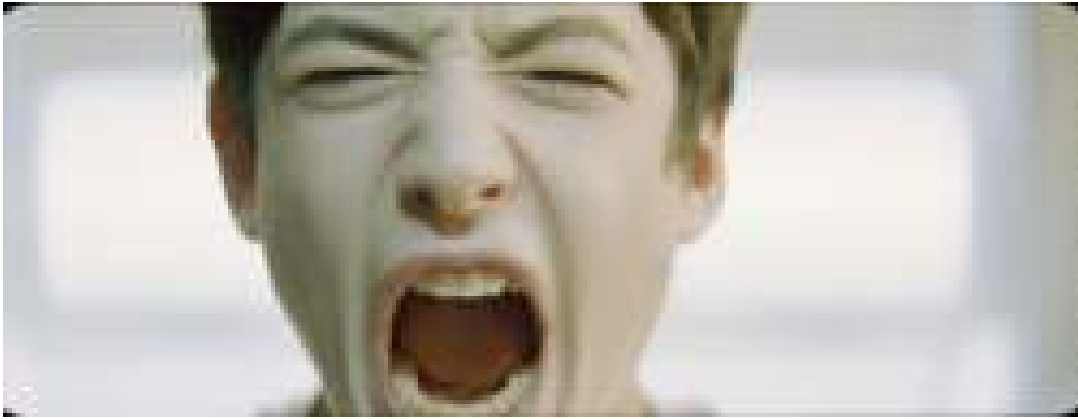
Editor: Sandy Saffeels

Music: Gabriel Yared

Production Designer: Alexander Manasse

Sound Design: Guido Zettier

Like his Oscar-nominated AFFLICTION (1997), Paul Schrader's latest film deals with an individual tormented by memories of horrific violence. Like MISHIMA (1985), it jumps boldly through time and space. And like AUTO FOCUS (2002), it serves up an alternately playful and disturbing mix of sordid reality and stylized, sexually charged fantasy. What's new and startling in ADAM is its black comedy, which Schrader deploys in an attempt to overturn every sentimental platitude established in the Holocaust-movie genre. Adam Steiner (Jeff Goldblum), the film's clown-victim-hero, survived the concentration camps by working for the Nazis, performing for Jews being marched off to the gas chambers. After the war, he landed in an Israeli mental institution in the Negev Desert designed for survivors. His incisive, manipulative intelligence—he's more brilliant than any doctor—and uncontrollable sexual hunger (is he the craziest patient there?) keep us wondering: Who's running the asylum? Noah Stollman adapts Yoram Kaniuk's celebrated 1971 novel, still one of the finest written about the aftermath of the Shoah. Goldblum, with fine support from Willem Dafoe, Derek Jacobi and Ayelet Zurer, gives the performance of a lifetime, reveling in every twist and quirk of Adam's character. —Larry Gross, Telluride Film Festival



AFTERSCHOOL

World Cinema

(USA, 2008, 106 mins)

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Antonio Campos

Directed By: Antonio Campos

Cast: Rosemarie DeWitt, Paul Sparks, Emory Cohen, Ezra Miller, Michael Stuhlbarg, Addison Timlin, Jeremy Allen White

Producers: Josh Mond, T. Sean Durkin

Executive Producer: Andrew F. Renzi, Victor Aaron, Susan Shopmaker, Rose Ganguzza

Director of Photography: Jody Lipes

Editor: Antonio Campos

A teenage rites-of-passage drama, *AFTERSCHOOL* vividly captures the corrosive omnipresence of web video footage for American teens. From violent YouTube-style clips to Internet pornography, our new media, this debut film from director Antonio Campos suggests, is creating a tangled web of confusion for the young people going through puberty. Among them is the skinny, socially awkward sophomore Robert (Ezra Miller), who already has developed a taste for rough porn. As two girls suffer fatal drug overdoses on campus, Robert inadvertently captures the tragedy with his video camera. When his video begins circulating, the atmosphere of paranoia and unease on campus grows, and he becomes increasingly troubled and withdrawn. Campos's startling, stylish debut opens us to deeper debate on the corrosive power of 21st-century imagery. But *AFTERSCHOOL* scratches gently at this phenomenon, rather than pushing to excess. Just 24, Campos demonstrates his skill at weaving together a variety of themes and concerns: the alienated angst of voyeurism, the pervasive influence of media violence, and the empowering nature of the web cam. Campos also explores, with great finesse, more familiar cinematic subject matter: the shifting allegiances and power dynamics at an American high school.



ALONE IN FOUR WALLS
ALLEIN IN VIER WANDEN

Documentary Competition

(Germany, 2008, 85 mins)

In Russian with English subtitles

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Alexandra Westmeier

Directed By: Alexandra Westmeier

Producer: Alexandra Westmeier, Inigo Westmeier

Director of Photography: Inigo Westmeier

Editor: Alexandra Westmeier

Director Alexandra Westmeier's absorbing documentary *ALONE IN FOUR WALLS* offers a poignant look at what a devastated economic structure can do to impressionable youth. This beautifully lensed film about Russian delinquent boys, all under the age of 14, allows its subjects to recount their offenses and share the often-tragic stories of their lives. Many of the boys have had no family or reliable support in life. There is no place for them in the sad world of their parents, who are often alcoholics, unemployed and living in hovels. And their unhappy expressions only brighten when they talk of their passions and their hopes. At this detention center, these adolescent boys no longer have to fight to survive. They do not have to face everyday torture from their families nor go hungry. They have found temporary refuge and solace among their four walls, in a juvenile detention center where they have a strict regiment, educational opportunities, decent meals and medical care. On the other hand, they are living amongst other thieves and even murderers. Can these boys build new lives for themselves? Displaying both great empathy and restraint, Westmeier builds a heartfelt portrait of innocence lost and a chance of redemption.

—Stacey Marbrey



BEFORE THE FALL

3 DÍAS

ALT_Cinema

(Spain, 2008, 93 mins)

In Spanish with English subtitles

35mm

US Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Juan Verlarde, F Gutierrez

Directed By: F Javier Gutiérrez

Cast: Victor Clavijo, Eduard Fernandez, Marilou Munoz, Mariana Cordero

Producers: Antonio Perez, José Ibáñez

Executive Producers: Antonio P. Perez, Antonio Meliveo

Director of Photography: Miguel A. Mora

Editor: Nacho Ruiz Capillas

Music: Antonio Meliveo

Life as we know it ends in three days. The leaders of the world have just announced that a comet is hurtling toward Earth. No one can stop it, and the object is so immense that there is no hope for any of us to survive. Unfolding against this terrifying backdrop is the story of a small family in a Spanish village, a simple group with a troubled history. A disturbed man from their past wants nothing more than to bring misery to the family, targeting the smallest, most vulnerable members of this clan. When he is released from prison—the impending global catastrophe has unleashed all kinds of chaos—the terror deepens. The world's ending in three days? That may not seem like soon enough for one family. This is the premise for one of the most original genre films in years, a quadruple winner at the Málaga film fest. Shocking and brilliantly executed, F. Javier Gutiérrez's first feature will leave you shaken.

—Lane Kneedler



BETTER THINGS

Narrative Competition

(United Kingdom, 2008, 93 mins)

35mm

North American Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Duane Hopkins

Directed By: Duane Hopkins

Cast: Rachel McIntyre, Emma Cooper, Liam McIlpatrick, Che Corr, Freddie Cunliffe

Producers: Samm Haillay, Rachel Robey

Executive Producers: Christopher Collins, Peter Carlton, Lizzie Francke, Paul Trijbits

Director of Photography: Lol Crawley

Editor: Chris Barwell

Music: Dan Berridge

Production Design: Jamie Leonard

"Real life was difficult, at best," Gail reads to herself, a good summation of this exploration of people connected by their isolation. An agoraphobic, Gail keeps inside, escaping into romance novels. Mr. and Mrs. Gladwin find their 60-year relationship shifting. In her abiding love, Mrs. Gladwin tries to erode, with little gestures, the barriers built by the years of unspoken truths. Rob is a heroin addict who has just lost his girlfriend Tess (in an early scene, we see her lying in her neat, quiet house, needle in her arm). But where do you find solace after the death of a loved one if you, and all your friends, are addicts too? A lush meditation on isolation and addiction in rural England, Duane Hopkins' surprisingly quiet film speaks volumes, delivering sharp insight into the lives of his characters. With raw, exacting performances by a mostly non-professional cast, BETTER THINGS wields fertile metaphors and a sophisticated sense of psychology. Hopkins penetrates the subtle process of human transformation and the possibilities for meaningful interchange lying dormant in contemporary country living. There are no shaky drug-fuelled parties here. Instead, Hopkins immerses us inside each person's loneliness. Lucid, articulate, and breathtakingly poetic, BETTER THINGS is nothing short of masterful.

—Shaz Bennett



BLOOD APPEARS

LA SANGRE BROTA

Showcase on Argentina

(Argentina, 2008, 100 mins)

In Spanish with English subtitles

35mm

North American Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Pablo Fendrik

Directed By: Pablo Fendrik

Cast: Arturo Goetz, Nahuel Perez Biscayart, Guadalupe Docampo, Stella Galazzi, Ailin Salas, Guillermo Arengo

Producer: Juan Pablo Gugliotta, Claire Lajoumard, Ole Landsjoassen

Executive Producer: Juan Pablo Gugliotta, Claire Lajoumard, Ole Landsjoassen

Director of Photography: Julian Apezteguia

Editor: Leandro Aste

Music: Juan Ignacio Bouscayrol

Argentine Pablo Fendrik broke into the independent film world with last year's *THE MUGGER*, a favorite at both AFI FEST 2007 and Cannes' Critics' Week. He returns with this keenly observed account of one middle-class family's disintegration. The story follows the struggles of Arturo, a cab driver who has to find \$2000 within 24 hours; his older son, Ramiro, who left home four years ago, has just phoned from Houston asking for urgent help. However, Arturo's wife Irene keeps their savings away from Arturo's reach. The same day, Leandro, their younger, drug-addicted son, tries to steal those savings, planning to make a profitable drug deal. Fueled by the extraordinary performances of Arturo Goetz (*THE MUGGER*) and the young Nahuel Pérez Biscayart (*GLUE*, *TATUADO*), Fendrik has crafted a story full of deep concealed wounds and unspoken words. "The main inspiration to write the film comes from my own family," Fendrik has said. "More precisely, from the memories I have of my younger brother and my father. This is how I knew it was all about blood." Fendrik's intimate knowledge with the subject makes *BLOOD APPEARS* a powerful, at times painful reflection on family dynamics.

—Shaz Bennett



A BOYFRIEND FOR MY WIFE

Added Screenings

(2008, 90 mins)

In Spanish with English subtitles

Directed By: JUAN TARATUTO

Cast: Adrian Suar, Valerie Bertuccelli, Gabriel Goity

El Tenso has reached his limits with La Tana, his wife. She's such a prolific talker—mostly complaining—that he finds her a job on the radio, where her show becomes a hit. Still, he's had enough. Can the Romeo he hires seduce La Tana and end their marriage once and for all?



THE CHASER

World Cinema

(South Korea, 2008, 123 mins)

In Korean with English subtitles

35mm

North American Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Na jin, Hong chan, Shinho Lee

Directed By: Na Hong-jin

Cast: Kim Yun-seok, Ha Jung-woo, Seo Young-hee, Koo Bon-woong

Producers: Sujin Kim, Yon In-beom

Executive Producers: Cheong Eui-seok, Kim Sun-yong, Jhung Seung-koo

Director of Photography: Sung-Je Lee

Editor: Sun-Min Kim

Ex-cop pimp Joong-ho is irritated because his girls keep disappearing without clearing their debts. One night, he gets a call from a customer and sends Min-ji. Joong-ho realizes the phone number of the customer matches that of the calls the missing girls got last. As something smells fishy, he searches for her. During his search, Joong-ho dents a car in the alley. When he spots blood splattered on the driver's shirt, he senses the man, Yeong-min, is the suspect. After an intense chase he catches Yeong-min. But because of Joong-ho's pretense as a cop, they are both taken to the police station. At the station, the man bluntly confesses he has killed the missing women, and the last girl, Min-ji, may still be alive. As the whole police force is obsessed with a random search for corpses, Joong-ho is the only one who believes Min-ji is still alive. With only 12 hours left to detain the serial killer without a warrant, his hunt begins, searching for Min-ji trapped in a place nobody knows.

**CHE**

Galas

(USA , Spain, 2008, 262 mins)

In Spanish with English subtitles

VIDEO

Screenwriter(s) : Peter Buchman, Benicio Toro**Directed By:** Steven Soderbergh**Cast:** Benicio Del Toro, Demian Bichir, Santiago Cabrera, Elvira Minguez**Producers:** Laura Bickford, Benicio Del Toro**Executive Producers:** Frederic W. Brost, Gregory Jacobs, Alvaro Augustin, Belen Atienza, Alvaro Longoria, Brahim Chioua, Vincent Maraval, Philip Elway**Director of Photography:** Peter Andrews**Editor:** Pablo Zumarranga**Music:** Alberto Iglesias**Sound Design:** Larry Blake, Gabriel Guitierrez**Production Design:** Antxon Gomez

One of American film's leading revolutionaries takes on one of modern history's most famous radicals in this two-part epic. The first segment, THE ARGENTINE, opens with Ernesto "Che" Guevara (Benicio Del Toro, in his most extraordinary, charismatic and nuanced performance yet), as an Argentine doctor who casts his fate with Fidel Castro (a remarkable performance by Demián Bichir) when they sail to Cuba on November 26, 1956, accompanied by 80 rebels. Upon arrival, Che trained and fought, despite suffering from debilitating asthma, to become one of the major military leaders of the victorious Cuban revolution against the corrupt dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. In the second segment, GUERILLA, Che struggles to replicate this triumph, trying to export Marxist revolution to Bolivia with disastrous results (Lou Diamond Phillips is memorable as the head of Bolivia's Communist Party). In films ranging from SEX, LIES AND VIDEOTAPE to SCHIZOPOLIS to the OCEAN'S series, Steven Soderbergh has demonstrated a determination to discover every diverse corner of the film medium's expressive potential. He seems eager to learn how to master doing everything that film can do. Here, he tackles the historical epic with verve and formal innovation, while giving us a meticulous picture of Che's evolution and learning process as a revolutionary. Perhaps because of a kinship felt with his subject, Soderbergh, in this sprawling biography, manages to provide a surprisingly intimate portrait of the artist.



CHOUGA

Showcase on Kazakhstan

(France , Kazakhstan, 2007, 88 mins)

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Darezhan Omirbaev

Directed By: Darezhan Omirbaev

Screenwriter: Darezhan Omirbaev

Director of photography: Boris Troshev

Editor: Mikhail Aranyshv

Sound mixer: Dominique Viellard

Cast: Ainur Turgambayeva, Aidos Sagatov, Ainur Sapargali, Jassoulan Assaouov

Since winning prizes for KAIRAT (Silver Leopard, Venice 1992) and KILLER (Un Certain Regard Prize, Cannes, 1998), Darezhan Omirbaev has served as the inspirational center of Kazakhstan's resurgent cinema. With this loose adaptation of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, he demonstrates the versatility, psychological insights, formal innovation and skill with actors that have made him a major figure on the international film scene. The beautiful Chouga is in an unsatisfying marriage to a politician and mover and shaker in their city's explosive new economy. When she returns home for a family crisis, she meets the young Ablai, a casually passionate young member of an emerging upper class. The two fall for each other, leaving Chouga with tough decisions to make. Though the story follows the well-worn tracks of traditional melodrama, Omirbaev considers the entire affair with a careful, distanced gaze, allowing the actors to carry the weight of the story with their faces and gestures. Much of the action takes place off-screen, allowing us to see more or less what the characters see. The lack of narrative manipulations, however, doesn't make CHOUGA an emotionally detached film. Instead, we are invited into Chouga's world—experiencing the same senses of distance, of confusion, of awkward quietude, of passion that she does. Delicate, poignant and masterfully paced, this is the work of an artist in full control of his medium.



THE CLASS

World Cinema

(France, 2008, 120 mins)

In French with English subtitles

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Francois Begaudeau, Laurent Cantet, Robin Campillo

Directed By: Laurent Cantet

Cast: Francois Begaudeau, Nassim Amrabt, Laura Baguela, Cherif Bounaidja Rachedi

Producers: Carole Scotta, Caroline Benjo, Barbara Letellier, Simon Arnal

Director of Photography: Catherine Pujol, Pierre Milon, Georgi Lazarevski,

Editors: Stephanie Leger, Robin Campillo

Laurent Cantet, already a hero to cineastes for his class-strife studies *TIME OUT* and *HEADING SOUTH*, breaks into the international spotlight with this Palme d'Or-winning story of Francois who, along with his fellow teachers, is preparing for a new year at a high school in a tough Parisian neighborhood. Armed with the best intentions, these teachers brace themselves against the inevitable discouragement. Can they give their students the best education possible in an unfriendly environment? *THE CLASS* powerfully presents one high school as a microcosm of contemporary France, with its sometimes explosive cultural and class differences. But this is also a film about everyday heroism. By creating an atmosphere that's neither stuffy nor severe, expecting the highest performance from his students and providing them with the kind of honesty they need and deserve but only rarely encounter, Francois demands success from his students. Of course, faced with the rising standards, some students rebel ... Based on the autobiographical novel by Francois Begaudeau, *THE CLASS*'s immediacy and intimacy arises from its use of real students and teachers and from carefully deployed video cameras, which give the story its gritty, street-level feel. And this startling, inspiring story shows Paris like we've never seen it before.



DEADGIRL

ALT_Cinema

(USA, 2008, 101 mins)

HDCAM

Screenwriter(s) : Trent Haaga

Directed By: Marcel Sarmiento,

Gadi Harel

Cast: Candice Accola, Michael Bowen, Noah Segan, Shiloh Fernandez

Producers: Marcel Sarmiento, Gadi Harel

Executive Producers: Chris Webster, Rob Hickman

Director of Photography: Harris Charalambous

Editor: Phillip Blackford

Music: Joseph Bauer

Co Producer: Cynthia Graner

Co Producer: Vince Maggio

www.deadgirlmovie.com/

This unexpectedly challenging film tangles the archetypal male coming-of-age narrative with the mechanics of paracinema. Using familiar visual tropes of a slasher-zombie-voyeur-horror flick, co-directors Marcel Sarmiento and Gadi Harel make literal the terrifying hyperbolic metaphors of adolescent anxiety. Thus, the story begins under the guise of a film that we have seen countless times. Rickie (Shiloh Fernandez) and JT (Noah Segan) break into an abandoned mental institution to release their repressed energy, getting drunk and obliterating any evidence of order. In the sinister basement, they find the body of a hot girl, defiled by grime and bodily fluids. Soon, the initial shock is surpassed by the alarming discovery that her body still moves. When faced with the decision of what to do with her, the boys encounter the dark side of their own pathologies. JT decides to make her the test-subject of a horrific fantasy while Rickie struggles between his own desires and moral responsibility. A dangerous battle of wills erupt and lead to actions that are sadistic, vulgar, and yet somehow predictable... that is, until more people begin to find out about her. In its ineffably lewd climax, all the social constructs begin to corrode. Our repulsion crescendo to a degree that makes DEADGIRL as hard to watch as it is to look away from.

-- Aliza Ma



DEFIANCE

Galas

(USA, 2008, 137 mins)

35mm

World Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Edward Zwick, Clay Frohman, Nechama Tec

Directed By: Edward Zwick

Cast: Daniel Craig, Liev Schreiber, Jamie Bell, Alexa Davalos

Producers: Edward Zwick, Pieter Jan Brugge, Roland Tec, Troy Putney, Alisa Katz

Director of Photography: Eduardo Serra, Robert Alazraki, Gilbert Lecluyse

Editor: Steven Rosenblum

Music: James Newton Howard

Based on an extraordinary true story, and directed by AFI alum Edward Zwick, this epic tale of family, honor, vengeance and salvation in World War II begins in 1941. The Jews of Eastern Europe are being massacred by the thousands. Managing to escape certain death, three brothers take refuge in the dense surrounding woods they have known since childhood. There they begin their desperate battle against the Nazis. Daniel Craig, Liev Schreiber and Jamie Bell star as brothers who turn a primitive struggle to survive into something far more consequential—a way to avenge the deaths of their loved ones by saving thousands of others. At first it is all they can do to stay alive. But gradually, as whispers of their daring spread, they begin to attract others—men and women, young and old—willing to risk everything for the sake of even a moment’s freedom. Tuvia (Craig) is a reluctant leader, and his decisions are challenged by his brother Zus (Schreiber), who worries that Tuvia’s idealistic plans will doom them all. Asael (Bell) is the youngest—caught between his brothers’ fierce rivalry. As a brutal winter descends, they work to create a community, and to keep faith alive when all humanity appears to be lost.



THE DESERT WITHIN
DESIERTO ADENTRO

Narrative Competition

(Mexico, 2008, 110 mins)

In Spanish with English subtitles

35mm

North American Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Laura Santullo, Rodrigo Pla

Directed By: Rodrigo Pla

Cast: Mario Zaragoza, Diego Catano, Memo Dorantes, Eileen Yanez, Luis Fernando Pena, Jimena Ayala, Katia Xanat Espino, Dolores Heredia, Angelina Pelaez, Martin Zapata, Alan Chavez

Producers: Germán Méndez, Rodrigo Plá

Executive Producer: Germán Méndez

Director of Photography: Serguei Saldívar Tanaka

Editors: Ana García, Rodrigo Plá

Music: Jacobo Lieberman, Leonardo Heiblum

Sound: Mario Martínez Cobos, Antonio Diego

Art Direction: Gloria Carrasco, Antonio Plá, Juan José Medina, Rita Basulto.

Costume Design: Adela Cortázar, Malena de la Riva

Rodrigo Plá sets this compelling moral and spiritual fable during one of Mexico's bloodiest periods. In the late 1920s, the revolutionary socialist government attempted to outlaw the Catholic Church, making the performance of religious rituals illegal and punishable by death. Elias, a devout peasant hoping to help his wife while she suffers through childbirth, demands the attention of a priest, and unwittingly encourages a terrible act of violence to occur in his town of San Isidro. Elias has a vision that his children will die prematurely as punishment for his actions. Driven to near madness by his guilt, he takes his family, including Aureliano, the sickly newborn, far into the desert to seek atonement. His project: to build a church. But only he and his children will ever see it. Like the novels of Graham Greene and the most demanding films of Tarkovsky and Dreyer, *THE DESERT WITHIN* critiques the cruel and unjust possibilities of severe religious practice. At the same time, Plá brings tremendous spiritual intensity to his work, leaving a visceral sense of the powers of deep faith. This fascinating second feature film by Plá, the winner of a Student Oscar as a short filmmaker, signals the arrival of a major new talent in Mexican cinema.



DIM SUM FUNERAL

Added Screenings

(2008, 95 mins)

Directed By: Anna Chi

Cast: Steph Song, Kelly Hu, Bai Ling, Talia Shire, Russell Wong, Julia Nickson, Chang Tseng, Lisa Lu

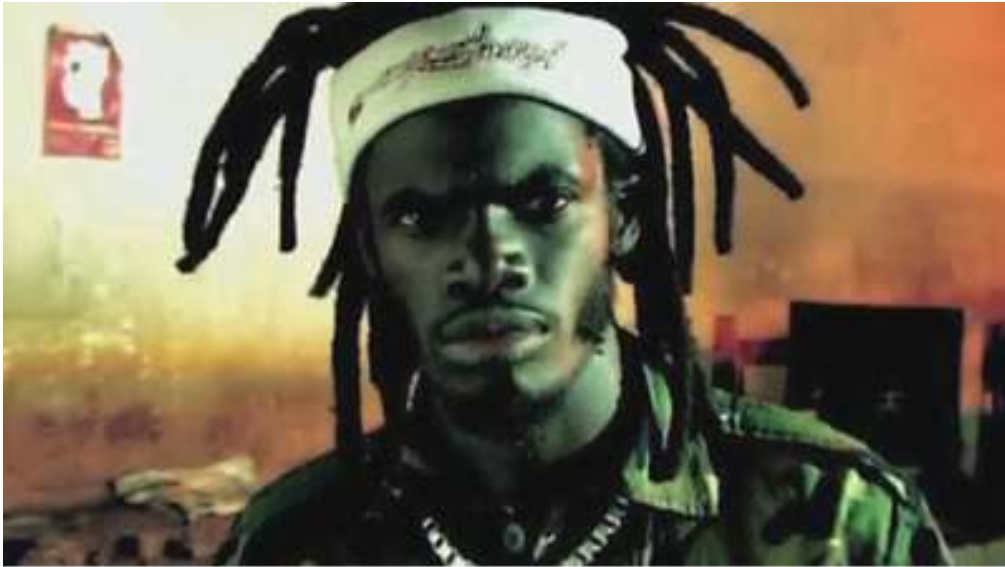
Producer: Jeffery Lando

Executive Producers: Clark Peterson, Tom Berry, Andy Reimer, Donald Martin, Ray Cuerdo

Director of photography: Michael Balfry

Editor: Karen Porter

An Irish funeral has what's called a wake; a Jewish funeral has what's called sitting shiva; and a traditional Chinese funeral is something else entirely---which is what the estranged siblings of a Westernized Chinese-American family discover as they try to fulfill their mother's last wish



DIVISIONZ

World Cinema

(Uganda , South Africa, 2008, 89 mins)

Digital Betacam

North American Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Yes us

Directed By: Yes that's us!

Cast: Kyagulanyi “Bobi Wine” Ssentamu, Bugembe “Buchaman” Mark, Catherine “Scarlet” Nakyanzi, Olem ‘Lot’ Bonny, Katsigire Patrick

Producers: Donald Mugisha, Adolf El Assal

Director of Photography: James Tyler

Editors: Donald Mugisha, James Tyler

Music: Roadblock, Chillum Woods Sound

The Ugandan visual arts collective Yes! That’s us takes on filmmaking, blasting the screen with sure-footed confidence. In this compelling tale of friendship and ambition, Kapo, Bana, Kanyankole and Mulokole are four aspiring musicians who have been offered a performance slot at a pub in the city that is starting open-mic sessions. Kapo quits his job and raises money to record himself and his friends performing, and for transport fare to the city. But before they can get to there, they are ambushed by tax enforcement officers, just one of the obstacles that test their friendship and the strength of their mission. In a seamless flow of kinetic energy, DIVISIONZ weaves together day-in-the-life footage with strong performances from the collective, and the result is a vibrant, immediate film. It stars musical artists Kyagulanyi “Bobi Wine” Ssentamu, Bugembe “Buchaman” Mark, Catherine “Scarlet” Nakyanzi and Olem “Lot” Bonny, who, along with Peter Miles, Jaquee, Benon, Crystal Fabulous, Akiiki Romeo, Thornhead and Shada Band, infuse the film with the musical energy that’s thriving throughout urban Africa. Thanks to the music and a universally pleasing story, DIVISIONZ offers an evocative and riveting mosaic of modern Ugandan life.

–Shaz Bennett



DOUBT

Galas

(2008, 100 mins)

John Patrick Shanley brings his Pulitzer Prize and Tony Award winning play to the screen as a gripping story about the quest for truth, the forces of change, and the devastating consequences of blind justice in an age defined by moral conviction.

It's 1964, St. Nicholas in the Bronx. A vibrant, charismatic priest, Father Flynn (Academy Award® winner Philip Seymour Hoffman), is trying to upend the schools' strict customs, which have long been fiercely guarded by Sister Aloysius Beauvier (Academy Award® winner Meryl Streep), the iron-gloved Principal who believes in the power of fear and discipline. The winds of political change are sweeping through the community, and indeed, the school has just accepted its first black student, Donald Miller. But when Sister James (Academy Award® nominee Amy Adams), a hopeful innocent, shares with Sister Aloysius her guilt-inducing suspicion that Father Flynn is paying too much personal attention to Donald, Sister Aloysius sets off on a personal crusade to unearth the truth and to expunge Flynn from the school. Now, without a shard of proof besides her moral certainty, Sister Aloysius locks into a battle of wills with Father Flynn which threatens to tear apart the community with irrevocable consequence.

Academy Award® winning screenwriter John Patrick Shanley ("Moonstruck") adapted his own play for the screen and directs DOUBT, starring Meryl Streep, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Amy Adams and Viola Davis. The film is produced by Scott Rudin and Mark Roybal, with Celia Costas as executive producer.



ESTHER KAHN

Showcase on Desplechin
(2000, 164 mins)

Directed By: Arnaud Desplechin

Screenwriter: Arnaud Desplechin, Emmanuel Bourdieu

Cast: Summer Pheonix, Ian Holm.

Phoenix stars as a sullen 19-year -old who improbably rises from her immigrant family's sweatshop to play the lead in Hedda Gabler in this mesmerizing period drama that confounds expectations at every turn. Modeled on Truffaut's *The Wild Child*, Desplechin's sole English-language film explores the inherent artifice of acting. Crowned film of year by Cahiers du cinema and based on a short story by Symbolist scholar Arthur Symons,



EVERLASTING MOMENTS

World Cinema

(Sweden , Denmark, 2008, 125 mins)

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Niklas Rådström, Jan Troell, Agneta Troell

Directed By: Jan Troell

Cast: Maria Heiskanen, Mikael Persbrandt, Jesper Christensen

Producer: Thomas Stenderup

Director of Photography: Mischa Gavrjusjov

Editor: Niels Pagh Andersen

Music: Matti Bye

Production Design: Peter Bavman

Sound Design: Olle Tannergaard

One fine day in 1907 in the Swedish village of Malmö, Maria Larsson (Maria Heiskanen) wins a Contessa camera in a lottery. That camera accounts for the title of the latest film by the Swedish master and Oscar nominee Jan Troell. Over a decade, the family grows from three to seven children, and Maria struggles to keep her home and family together in the face of the Great War, hard times, a workers' strike, unemployment and a chronically philandering and abusive husband (Mikael Persbrandt). Still, under the tutelage of the kindly village photographer, Sebastian Pedersen (Jesper Christensen), Maria enthusiastically masters the camera, producing, from her own darkroom, fragile images of the family cat, the children, her neighbors, village parades, her friend Pederson and, finally, herself. "Not everyone is endowed with the gift of seeing," Pederson tells her, an unspoken love in his eyes. "You see a world there to be explored—to preserve, to describe. Those who have seen it cannot merely close their eyes. You can't turn back." This is a family album, a humane and compassionate series of glimpses into lives we care about and are grateful to know. And all of it is captured not just through the camera eyes of Maria, but through the affectionate viewfinder of Troell himself.

-- John C. Tibbetts



FINALLY, LILLIAN AND DAN

World Cinema

(USA, 2008, 97 mins)

HDCAM

Screenwriter(s) : Mike Gibisser, Gretchen Akers, Jason Kean

Directed By: Mike Gibisser

Cast: Gretchen Akers, Jason Kean, Lucy Quinn, Timothy Blevins, Sarah Augusta, Mary DiCamillo, Ellen DiCamillo, Karen Uptegrove, Tim Howard, Casey Engels, Susan Turman

Producer: Mike Gibisser

Director of Photography: Mike Gibisser, Susan Turman

Editor: Mike Gibisser

Music: Soltero, Mileece, Casey Dienel

Mike Gibisser's auspicious debut feature includes so much original vision it's hard not to feel a tremor of excitement: a new voice in American cinema has arrived. **FINALLY, LILLIAN AND DAN** offers a meditation on young love and its delicacy, its hope and exhilaration, as well as its loneliness and naiveté. Lillian lives a quiet, comfortable life of isolation, sharing an apartment with her grandmother. Their dependence on one another is mutual, simultaneously making them whole and holding them back. Dan lives a more tortured solitude, making attempts at human connection in compulsive fits and starts. After a chance meeting, Lillian and Dan stumble their way toward one another in a love story that stutters, spits and wears its heart on its sleeve. Wonderfully awkward performances by Gretchen Akers, Jason Kean and Lucy Quinn fuel Gibisser's world, in which the mundane is transcendent, and everyday people become radiant characters. The writing credit is shared by Gibisser and his leads, and their semi-improvisational style makes for some powerful, truthful, deeply human moments. Seeking togetherness through tender yet tortuous routes, they find redemption in the small moments of connection to someone else on Earth.

—Shaz Bennett



FOOD FIGHT

Free Screenings

(USA, 2008, 83 mins)

HDCAM

Directed By: Chris Taylor

Producers: Chris Taylor, Mark Rossen

Executive Producer: Alan Siegel

Director of Photography: Pete Fuszard

Editor: Miranda Yousef

Music: Scott Harper

www.foodfightthedoc.com/

Horrible news: there's been a governmental conspiracy afoot for decades to make America's food less delicious! In Chris Taylor's gastronomical documentary, this crime against our taste buds is comprehensively exposed, with the revolutionary stance against it (otherwise known as organic produce) brought into delectable relief. Taylor reaches as far back as World War II to explain our country's initial tendency toward corporate-owned, mass-produced and flavorless agricultural goods, and examines how this trend has ultimately landed the United States in the unhealthy state it is in today. From there, the documentary takes a mouthwatering turn as it follows the now-legendary chefs who spearheaded the California Cuisine movement. Notables such as Chez Panisse owner Alice Waters, Wolfgang Puck, Jeremiah Tower and Suzanne Goin are interviewed, with their stories of culinary triumph lovingly retold. In a country where The Man seems to have quality control over almost all aspects of our lives, a fight for fresh food is more than just a tummy growl—it's a subversive move to protect our right to be healthy and happy. FOOD FIGHT fully promotes this idea, and urges its viewers to continue the 50-year battle for deliciousness by buying locally and eating organically. And who could argue? All we have to lose is our heart disease, obesity and wealthy corporate middlemen. Viva la revolution!

-- Beth Hanna



GACHI BOY WRESTLING WITH A MEMORY

GACHI BOI

ALT_Cinema

(Japan, 2008, 120 mins)

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Seiji Nishida

Directed By: Norihiro Koizumi

Cast: Ryuta Sato, Saeko, Osamu Mukai, Riisa Naka

Producers: Masahiko Oda, Chikahiro Ando, Naomi Akashi

Executive Producers: Chihiro Kameyama, Shuji Abe, Yoshishige Shimatani

Director of Photography: Takahito Kasai

Editor: Hiroaki Morishita

Music: Naoki Sato

Original Story: Ryuta Horai

Every morning, the 20-year-old law student Igarashi (Ryuta Sato) wakes up able to remember only a portion of his life—the part that happened prior to a bicycle accident that damaged his frontal cortex and temporal lobe. Resorting to copious notes and Polaroids, Igarashi tries to cull together some semblance of continuity to his life that will validate and confirm his existence. But he's unable to succeed at his studies. He does, however, find a possible solution in his school's pro wrestling club. Collegiate pro wrestling differs from “real” pro wrestling in that it focuses on the entertainment and comedic, storytelling aspects of the sport—aspects that enthrall Igarashi to no end. Seeing this as an opportunity to feel alive again, he joins up and is openly welcomed by the club, which has seen its popularity dwindle. Unaware of Igarashi's condition, the club members are mystified at his inability to learn even the simplest staging, and when his much anticipated debut match comes along, Igarashi ends up improvising most of it, to the great delight of viewers. Soon, he has drawn a large following and is single-handedly boosting the club's popularity to an all-time high. Just when he seems to have overcome his fate, Igarashi is dealt another challenging blow. This surprisingly poignant yet wildly funny comedy—an audience favorite at several international festivals (Grand Prix at the Udine Far East Film Festival)—immediately puts young director Norihiro Koizumi on the map.



GOGOL BORDELLO NON-STOP

Documentary Competition

(USA, 2008, 87 mins)

In English, Russian, Spanish, French with English subtitles

Digital Betacam

North American Premiere

Directed By: Margarita Jimeno

Featuring: Eugene Hütz, Oren Kaplan, Sergey Ryabtsev, Yuri Lemeshev, Eliot Ferguson, Manu Chao, Roy Paci, Yuri Yunakov

Producer: Margarita Jimeno, Darya Zhuk

Executive Producer: Ramon Jimeno

Co-Producer: Munir Maluf Raad

Director of Photography: Margarita Jimeno

Editor: Margarita Jimeno, Jenny Golden

www.hoptzafilms.com/gogol.html

“Gogol Bordello is a collective, musically and politically. We create an insane party atmosphere to deliver social and political commentary.”

-Eugene Hütz

After years spent in various European refugee camps, Eugene Hütz made his reputation in the U.S. as a DJ at New York's hipster clubs. But he had bigger plans. Recruiting musicians from five countries, he formed Gogol Bordello, the name a mash-up of the name of a 19th-century Ukrainian author and the place where erotic pleasure and vulgarity are celebrated. This film, shot over five wild years, follows the hugely entertaining Hütz and the members of his band as they tell their stories, share their music and progress from underground legend to international phenomenon. Hütz chips in home movies from Kiev. Going far beyond the concert film, GOGOL BORDELLO NON-STOP explores the roots of the music, identity and global politics of a band with something to say. Hütz has become an underground superstar (and he starred in Liev Schreiber's EVERYTHING IS ILLUMINATED and Madonna's FILTH AND WISDOM), with his band now filling huge venues. But for those of us who remember seeing them in tiny clubs in Manhattan, where you left the show drenched in sweat (both your own and Hütz'), we get to relive those electric, magical nights thanks to filmmaker Margarita Jimeno. Even if you weren't there, Jimeno's film makes you feel like you were and it's a good place to be!

-- Shaz Bennett



GOMORRAH

World Cinema

(Italy, 2008, 136 mins)

In Italian with English subtitles

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Ugo Chiti, Matteo Garrone, Massimo Gaudioso, Maurizio Braucci, Gianni DiGregorio, Roberto Saviano

Directed By: Matteo Garrone

Cast: Toni Servillo, Gianfelice Imparato, Salvatore Abruzzese, Maria Nazionale

Producer: Domenico Procacci

Director of Photography: Marco Onorato

Editor: Marco Spoletini

Music: Matthew Herbert

Sound Design: Leslie Shatz

Production Design: Paolo Bonfini

We've seen the story on screen before: first a breakdown in loyalties among crime gangs, then a wave of unthinkable violence. But writer-director Matteo Garrone injects this tale—winner of Cannes' Grand Prize—with an epic Balzacian vision. Garrone adapted Roberto Saviano's sensational best-selling investigative account of Naples' organized crime organizations (a book that made author Saviano both an international figure and a target of an ongoing Mob hit), and he directs with considerable, at times gut-wrenching, verve and poise. GOMORRAH presents six stories, each of which presents us with rich characters in fresh situations. Don Ciro (Gianfelice Imparato) is an exhausted, frightened bagman whose job is buying Mob control over fear-paralyzed slum dwellers. The tailor Pasquale (Salvatore Cantalupo) hopes to get his designs out of a Mob-owned factory. And the entrepreneurial Franco (Toni Servillo) trades in garbage and toxic waste; his smooth philosophical grin seems to be the very symbol of the terrifying, inescapable weight of corruption. Vivid, fast-paced and unsettling, GOMORRAH is the most ambitious vision of the consequences of the Mob yet put to film. —Larry Gross, Telluride Film Festival



A GOOD DAY TO BE BLACK & SEXY

World Cinema

(USA, 2008, 93 mins)

HDCAM

Screenwriter(s) : Dennis Dortch

Directed By: Dennis Dortch

Cast: Chonte Harris, Marcuis Harris, Mylika Davis, Jerome Hawkins

Producer: Layla Mashavu, Dennis Dortch, Adetoro Makinde

Executive Producer: Angela Flowers-Dortch, Jonathan Cutler, Paula Parson

Director of Photography: Brian Ali-Harding

Editors: Dennis Dortch, Tangier A. Clarke

theblackandsexymovie.com/

African-American writer-director Dennis Dortch's smart, sensuous debut explores the ever-shifting balance of power in the tug of war between the genders. Set in Los Angeles over the course of one day, the film is composed of six vignettes about the intimate territory of sexual desire as played out in bedrooms, kitchens and the back seats of cars. Dortch's take on black sexuality bears no trace of the old stereotypes as defined and analyzed in Donald Bogle's seminal *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mamies & Bucks*, a critical work on the history of black stereotypes in Hollywood. Instead, Dortch's characters are dynamic, his dialogue raw and relaxed, and his visual aesthetic seductive. Some of the scenes are hilarious, most are familiar to romantics of any color, and Dortch elicits great performances from the strong women he has cast—Kathryn Taylor, Chonte Harris, Mylika Davis and Emily Liu. As much as the filmmaking draws, in style and attitude, from wonderful sources—there are nods to Melvin Van Peebles, Charles Burnett, Julie Dash, Spike Lee, French and Italian auteurs and '90s independents—Dortch has crafted an original, irreverent and fresh American independent film.

-- Jacqueline Lyanga



THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE WEIRD

World Cinema

(South Korea, 2007, 130 mins)

In Korean with English subtitles

35mm

North American Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Kim Woon, Kim seok

Directed By: Kim Jee-woon

Cast: Lee Byeong-heon, Jung Woo-sung, Jeong Woo-seong, Song Kang-ho

Producers: Choi Jae-won, Kim Jee-Woon, Kim Joo-sung, Chang Yong-woon

Executive Producer: Miky Lee

Director of Photography: Lee Mo-gae

Editor: Na-young Nam

Music: Dalparan, Chang Young-gyu

Sound Design: Choi Tae-young

Production Design: Cho Hwa-sung

One might call director Kim Ji-Woon's stunning \$10 million homage to Clint Eastwood and Sergio Leone a kimchi Western. The sixth film by the director of the cult favorite *A TALE OF TWO SISTERS* (2003) and *A BITTERSWEET LIFE* (2005), *THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE WEIRD* continues Kim's South Korean box-office winning streak. The film boasts masterful high-speed action like you've never seen before: think *STAGECOACH* meets high-wire Jackie Chan meets *THE ROAD WARRIOR*. Tongue firmly in cheek, this comedy actioner is set on the Japanese-occupied Manchurian steppe in the 1930s as a bizarre trio of Korean exiles—The Good (Jung Woo-sung, a sharpshooting bounty hunter in a duster), The Bad (Lee Byung-hun, a wickedly handsome knife-throwing gang leader) and The Weird (Song Khang-Ho, a two-fisted gun-slinging thief)—get their hands on a treasure map and then set off in hot pursuit of buried Qing dynasty loot. Kim's exhilarating, escalating mayhem pits our three antiheroes against fast-moving trains, horses, trucks, motorcycles, Jeeps, explosions, Japanese and Chinese soldiers and Russian bandits. And, after all that, their final, existential showdown does not disappoint.

—Anne Thompson



THE HEADLESS WOMAN
LA MUJER SIN CABEZA

Showcase on Argentina

(Argentina , Spain , France , Italy, 2008, 87 mins)

In Spanish with English subtitles

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Lucrecia Martel

Directed By: Lucrecia Martel

Cast: Maria Onetto, Ines Efron, Cesar Bordon, Claudia Cantero, Daniel Genoud, Guillermo Arengo, Maria Vaner

Producers: Pedro Almodovar, Augustin Almodovar, Esther Garcia, Veronica Cura, Enrique Pineyro, Lucrecia Martel, Marianne Slot, Vieri Razzini, Cesare Petrillo, Tilde Corsi

Executive Producer: Veronica Cura

Director of Photography: Barbara Alvarez

Editor: Miguel Scherdfinger

Lucrecia Martel's *LA CIÉNEGA* skewered the corruption of a wealthy Argentine family and their servants. In *THE HOLY GIRL*, Martel explored an adolescent girl's erotic-religious obsession. Now, in her third and most demanding film, *THE HEADLESS WOMAN* (co-produced by Pedro Almodovar and his brother Augustin), Martel ingeniously depicts an upper-class matron in crisis. The heroine, Verónica (María Onetto), is racing home when she hits an object in the road. We, and she, are not sure what it might be. Verónica drives away haunted by what may or may not have happened. The film focuses literally and figuratively on her, gazing through long focal shots that blur the space around her, trapping her in a world of guilt and paranoia. What Verónica discovers, among other things, is that none of her friends are particularly interested in hearing about her complicity in a potential crime. Their selfish, obsessive daily routines mean too much to them; they simply can't be bothered. The stinging judgment on polite society comes very close to harsh comedy. Martel's widescreen camera is as stunning as it is disorienting and ambiguous, frustrating our desire for moral clarity. Verónica is trapped, like a ghost, in the mediocrity of her everyday life. Martel implicates us in Verónica's point of view and with the same state of confusion—and that's exactly what is so brilliant about the film.



THE HIGHER FORCE

Narrative Competition
(Iceland, 2008, 80 mins)
HDCAM

North American Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Olaf Fleur, Stefan Schaefer, Thorvaldur Thorsteinsson

Directed By: Olaf Fleur

Cast: Petur Johann Sigfusson, Eggert Thorleifsson, Stefan Schaefer, Ingvar E. Sigurdsson, Ilmur Kristjansdottir, Michael Imperioli

Producers: Stefan Schaefer, Olaf De Fleur, Helgi Sverrisson

Director of Photography: Rune Kippervik

Music: Pavel E. Smid

Co Producer: Arni Samuelson, Thorvador Bjorgulfsson

www.poppolipictures.com/higherforce.html

On the heels of his stunning, critically acclaimed drama THE AMAZING TRUTH ABOUT QUEEN RAQUELA (2008), rising Icelandic filmmaker Olaf de Fleur Johannesson presents a quirky, hilarious, kindly comedy about a bumbling petty criminal who dreams of a better life as the true artist he really is. David spends his days as a mostly unsuccessful debt collector for a band of petty gangsters, and his nights writing poetry and pouring over a series of kung fu-inspired self-help videos he's convinced will eventually lead him to his true destiny. Constantly derided by his idiotic boss, ignored by his unstable mother, and confused by his crazy girlfriend, David's life seems at a standstill until he meets Harald Haraldsson, his new landlord. A retired teacher, Harald's warmth and intelligence are a welcome reprieve, but when David begins to suspect that Harald is in fact an infamous crime lord in hiding, David's worlds collide and he finds himself in an unfamiliar position of power. An absolutely new brand of comedy, de Fleur's film showcases the finely drawn eccentricities of his characters, pitch-perfect timing and a simple, genuine knack for storytelling. Brought to life by an ensemble cast of Icelandic familiars, and one notable American, THE HIGHER FORCE is an unforgettable, delightful romp through cultures and genres.

-- Maggie Mackay



HUNGER

World Cinema

(United Kingdom, 2008, 92 mins)

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Enda Walsh, Steve McQueen

Directed By: Steve McQueen

Cast: Michael Fassbender, Liam Cunningham, Stuart Graham, Liam McMahan

Producers: Laura Hastings-Smith, Robin Gutch

Executive Producers: Jan Youngusband, Peter Carlton, Linda James, Edmund Coulthard, Iain Canning

Director of Photography: Sean Bobbitt

Editor: Joe Walker

Music: David Holmes, Leo Abrahams

Sound Design: Paul Davies

Production Design: Tom McCullagh

Though ostensibly about the 1981 hunger strike initiated by Irish Republican Army leader Bobby Sands, this poetic-realist debut by Steve McQueen ventures into far deeper territory, seeking to visually articulate the very nature of oppression and resistance. Beginning with bloody knuckles rinsed in a basin, McQueen builds scene after vivid scene to provoke or enrage or enlighten us, and, ultimately, to break our hearts. Prisoners find creative means of dispersing feces with nowhere to go; a police officer weeps over the smashing of flesh; an execution is carried out against the most mundane backdrop imaginable. We don't see Sands until well into the film when, in a coup de cinema, he describes his motivations in one extraordinary continuous shot. Finally, we watch, stricken, as Sands, in silence, approaches his final transcendent state, flesh wasted but spirit very obviously intact. McQueen's feature, the deserving winner of the Discovery Award at Toronto and the opening night film at Un Certain Regard, takes us into places where only cinema might: the dark recesses of the human psyche, the bone-crushing force of oppression and the redemptive possibilities of self-sacrifice. As a visual artist, McQueen has reached legendary status in his native England (he won the country's most prestigious award, the Turner Prize, in 1999). Here, he transmutes a political story into something more resonant and permanent: "extreme cinema," as Peter Bradshaw described it, "for an extreme subject."

—Jason Silverman



IDIOTS AND ANGELS

Special Screenings
(USA, 2008, 78 mins)
35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Bill Plympton

Directed By: Bill Plympton

Producer: Bill Plympton

Executive Producer: Biljana Labovic

Editor: Kevin Palmer

Music: Greg Sextro, Nicole Renaud, Corey Allen Jackson, Rachel Garniez, Hank Bones, Didier Carmier, 3 Leg Torso, Tom Waits, Pink Martini

Following a career spanning decades, animation icon Bill Plympton thrusts his most sublimely provocative vision to date upon the world. His latest feature-length endeavor, a darkly comic fantasia without words, focuses on a vicious and dastardly fellow who haunts seedy locales. Perhaps due to his amoral intentions, he slowly is wasting away. One morning, he awakes to discover angel wings growing on his back—wings he's unable to remove. And our savage protagonist, against his will, finds himself compelled to perform acts of kindness. Can he be weaned off of his animalistic, self-satisfying and parasitic human traits? And as our cretin is separated from his base desires, how will others respond to the wings? Will they feel a gnawing jealousy? Will they try to destroy this enlightened one and reap the Holy benefits for their own selfish gains? Utilizing the character designs and pencil drawings that have become his signature, Plympton conjures a setting of twisted magic for this visually dazzling, wonderfully irreverent and imaginatively violent cautionary tale, in which morality clashes with opportunity. Offering the viewer a mishmash of philosophical pretense and inventive imagery, Plympton unfurls a distinctive, engaging fairytale that is joyous to behold.

—Landon Zakheim



**INVOLUNTARY
DE OFRIVILLIGA**

Narrative Competition
(Sweden, 2008, 98 mins)
35mm

North American Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Ruben Ostlund, Erik Hemmendorff

Directed By: Ruben Ostlund

Cast: Cecilia Milocco, Villmar Bjorkman, Linnea Cart-Lamy, Leif Edlund, Sara Eriksson

Producer: Erik Hemmendorff

Executive Producers: Gunnar Carlsson, Tomas Eskilsson

Director of Photography: Marius Dybwad Brandrud

Editor: Ruben Ostlund

Sound Design: Jan Alvermark

It's almost summer in Sweden. Throughout the city, people are engaging in minor indiscretions and misbehavior. Leffe likes to show off for his friends and play salacious pranks, especially when he's drinking. A righteous grade-school teacher doesn't know where to draw the line: she insists her fellow educators need a bit of instruction. And two young teenage girls who like to party and pose for sexy photos go a few steps too far. Inflected with an edgy, urban realism and dark, laconic wit, INVOLUNTARY offers an astute meditation on the intermingling of humans in our modern world. It's innovative in form, defiantly deeper in tone than a mere series of comic vignettes, and beautifully enacted by its ensemble cast. Director Ruben Ostlund writes about the germ of the idea behind the stories: "I played a computer game. The aim was to build and maintain a city. It was played from a bird's eye perspective, with humans represented by small dots. One press of the icon resulted in pandemonium amongst the inhabitants. I felt that through the emotional distance, I was able to observe in an interested yet distanced manner, without judging and without any feelings of discomfort." Ostlund replicates this effect, with astonishing success, with INVOLUNTARY.

INVOLUNTARY was selected for Cannes Official Selection "Un Certain regard" 2008.

-- Shaz Bennett



KASSIM THE DREAM

Documentary Competition

(Uganda , USA, 2008, 87 mins)

HDCAM

Directed By: Kief Davidson

Producers: Kief Davidson, Liz Silver

Executive Producers: Luke Thornton, Forest Whitaker, Keisha Whitaker, Joshua A. Green,

Director of Photography: Tony Molina Jr.

Editors: Kief Davidson, Tony Breuer

Music: Leonardo Heiblum, Jacobo Lieberman, Andres Solis

www.kassimthedream.com/

Kassim “The Dream” Ouma is a complex character. He's the 2004 IBF Junior Middleweight champion of the world, a father, a young man who hasn't seen his mother since he was a teen, and a former Ugandan child soldier who was abducted into a rebel army at the age of six. Kassim brings this powerful and painful personal history into the ring with him every time he fights. Despite the fact that Kassim is closer to the “American Dream” than most people will ever be, his wartime experiences in Africa still gnaw at his conscience. And it's this ache that sets Kassim on a journey to reclaim his past by seeking a military pardon from the president and government responsible for his abduction as a child. Kassim isn't asking for anything more than a safe return to the country he fled, but the government publicly declares that if Kassim returns to Uganda, he will be tried for desertion and, if found guilty, executed. Director Kief Davidson (THE DEVIL'S MINER), an AFI alum, and executive producer Forest Whitaker give us an intimate portrait of a captivating and charismatic young athlete who has reached the point in his life when he feels compelled to transform a legacy of sorrow into hope and inspiration. KASSIM THE DREAM received the American Film Market/SILVERDOCS Award at the 2008 SILVERDOCS AFI/Discovery Channel Documentary Festival.

–Jacqueline Lyanga



KINGS AND QUEEN

Showcase on Desplechin
(2004, 150 mins)

Directed By: Arnaud Desplechin

Screenwriter: Arnaud Desplechin, Roger Bohbot

Cast: Emmanuelle Devos, Mathieu Almaric, Catherine Deneuve

When single, working mother Devos discovers her father is gravely ill, she receives little support from her ex-boyfriend, a capricious, tax-dodging violinist (Cesar-winner Almaric) recently committed to a mental health institution where he improvises hip-hop choreography and verbally spars with his drug-addled lawyer and placid hospital supervisor Deneuve. Desplechin's outsized tragicomedy sticks to the director's self-imposed maxim (borrowed from Truffaut): every minute, four ideas.



KISSES

World Cinema

(Ireland, 2008, 72 mins)

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Lance Daly

Directed By: Lance Daly

Cast: Kelly O'Neill, Shane Curry, Stephen Rea, Neili Conroy, Paul Roe

Producer: Macdara Kelleher

Executive Producer: Les Kelly

Editor: J. Patrick Duffner

Music: Go Blimps Go

Sound Design: Robert Flanagan

Production Design: Waldemar Kalinowski

On Christmas Day, Dylan (Shane Curry) a sullen, asthmatic 11-year-old boy living in a filthy slum in Dublin flees his father's drunken violence. Along for the adventure is fellow 11-year-old Kylie (Kelly O'Neill), the bold, determined girl who lives next door. The two hope to find Dylan's older brother, who ran away from home two years earlier. Instead, they learn to their, and our, surprise, how deeply they love each other. As a bonus, they discover something about "the musical God" who Dylan is named for. Lance Daly wrote, directed and partially photographed this elegantly uncomplicated gem, winner of the best Irish feature award at Galway. He draws superlative performances from the two young leads, and creates a compelling image of Dublin that delicately alternates between the sordid and the magical, between washed-out black-and-white and gorgeous color. KISSES is a strong sign of Ireland's resurgent cinema, and it even pays homage to one of its heroes: Keep an eye out for Neil Jordan veteran Stephen Rea's charming uncredited cameo.

—Larry Gross, Telluride Film Festival



LAKE TAHOE

Narrative Competition

(Mexico, 2008, 81 mins)

In Spanish with English subtitles

35mm

North American Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Fernando Eimbcke, Paula Markovitch

Directed By: Fernando Eimbcke

Cast: Diego Cataño, Héctor Herrera, Daniela Valentine, Juan Carlos Lara, Yemil Sefami

Producer: Christian Valdelièvre

Executive Producer: Jamie Bernardo Ramos

Director of Photography: Alexis Zabé

Editor: Mariana Rodríguez

Art Director: Diana Quiroz

Sound Design: Lena Esquenazi

Sound Mixer: Antonio Diego

Costume Design & Makeup: Mariana Watson

Casting: Alejandro Caballero

Director Fernando Eimbcke returns to AFI FEST (his first film, DUCK SEASON, won the 2004 Grand Jury Prize) with his second film, one with a strong autobiographical element. After Eimbcke's father died, he passed through a long denial process and then crashed the family car. LAKE TAHOE was born out of these events as an attempt for Eimbcke to understand the reasons that pushed him to commit such an act, "such an absurd and profoundly human act" as he puts it. In an attempt to escape from a home where sorrow reigns, 16-year-old Juan crashes his family's car into a telegraph pole on the outskirts of town. Juan calls home, where his younger brother, Joaquín, tells him that their mother is still locked in the bathroom. Juan hangs up. After scouring the streets searching for someone to help him fix the car, Juan meets Don Heber, a paranoid mechanic whose only companion is Sica, his almost-human boxer dog. Don Heber promises to fix the car as soon as Juan can find a needed part, and so Juan sets off on an urban quest. LAKE TAHOE is a thoughtful, evocative portrayal of death, longing and the static nature of life sometimes. Combining the powers of observance and understatement, Eimbcke renders an emotional tale of a young man on a journey that will change his life.

—Shaz Bennett



THE LAST DAYS OF SHISHMAREF

Documentary Competition

(Netherlands, 2008, 90 mins)

In English/Inupiaq with English subtitles

35mm

US Premiere

Directed By: Jan Louter

Producer: Juul Kappelhof

Executive Producer: Renske Meertens

Director of Photography: Melle van Essen

Editor: Riekje Ziengs

Music: Paul M. van Brugge

www.shishmaref.nl/shishmaref/shishmaref_release-2.4.4/MainView.html

While politicians, scientists and environmentalists debate the effects of global warming, an Inupiaq Eskimo community in northwest Alaska, just under the Arctic Circle, faces the real world consequences of climate change every day. The ice beneath the small Alaskan village of Shishmaref, on the island of Sarichef, is melting. Homes are falling into the ocean. The situation is so severe that it has been predicted that the entire village will disappear within the next 10 years. How can you move an entire way of life? And should these villagers go to the edges of a city, or retain their rural ways? Filmmaker Jan Louter captures the transience of the Inupiaq's traditional way of life in the face of the collision of climate change, satellite television and mail order shopping. The icy landscape—its water, smoke, steam and sky—is beautifully photographed, as are the village's inhabitants. Every frame is a poignant portrait. The film doesn't present a barrage of facts and figures to make its point, instead giving the viewer entry into the issue of climate change by way of a third eye. We feel the loss, the pain and the sadness of the families as they realize that they will never recover a way of life being swallowed by the sea.

—Jacqueline Lyanga



LION'S DEN

LEONERA

Showcase on Argentina

(Argentina, 2008, 113 mins)

In Spanish with English subtitles

35mm

US Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Pablo Trapero, Alejandro Fadel, Martin Maurequi, Santiago Mitre

Directed By: Pablo Trapero

Cast: Martina Gusman, Elli Medeiros, Rodrigo Santoro, Laura Garcia

Producer: Pablo Trapero, Young-joo Suh

Executive Producer: Martina Gusman

Director of Photography: Guillermo Nieto

Editors: Pablo Trapero, Ezequiel Borovinsky

Sound Design: Federico Esquerro

Production Design: Graciela Oderigo

Director-screenwriter Pablo Trapero (ROLLING FAMILY, EL BONAERENSE) returns to AFI FEST with this redemptive story of a young pregnant woman trying to survive in prison. This film follows the ill-fated and beautiful Julia who, after killing her lover, gives birth to a son, Tomas, in prison. Helped through her early days in prison by her fellow prisoner Marta (Laura Garcia), Julia is allowed to raise Tomas in a ward for mothers. Then, Julia's own mother Sophia (Ellie Medeiros), returns to her life, and, behind her back, begins pulling strings to gain custody of Tomas. Furious and broken, Julia tries to rebel: "My child is all I have!" But is proximity to a mother enough reason for a child to grow up in prison? The intense Martina Guzman offers a ferocious depiction of a mother fighting against odds to stay with her son, and Trapero offers a thoughtful depiction of prison life, showing us both the endearing and the bleak, the innocent and the contemptible. Shot on location, and featuring richly drawn characters, LION'S DEN gives us an entirely new, energized, poetic and sensitive take on the women-behind-bars film.

—Shaz Bennett



LIVERPOOL

Showcase on Argentina

(Argentina , Netherlands , Spain , Germany , France, 2008, 84 mins)

In Spanish with English subtitles

35mm

US Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Salvador Roselli, Lisandro Alonso

Directed By: Lisandro Alonso

Cast: Juan Fernandez, Giselle Irrazabal, Nieves Cabrera

Producer: Lisandro Alonso, Ilse Hugan, Marianne Slot, Luis Minarro

Director of Photography: Lucio Bonelli

Editor: Lisandro Alonso, Fernando Epstein, Martin Mainoli, Sergi Dies

Music: Flormaleva

Production Design: Gonzalo Delgado

Sound Design: Catriel Vildesola

Lisandro Alonso, writer-director of *LA LIBERTAD* and *LOS MUERTOS* and one of the key figures of New Argentine Cinema, elevates his austere, meditative style to poetic, provocative new levels with this story of a loner adrift both at sea and in his life. *LIVERPOOL* follows the story of Farrel (Juan Fernandez), a sailor who, having traveled from one end of the earth to the other, asks the captain of the freighter he works on for permission to go ashore once they reach the port of Ushuala, the southernmost town in Argentina. Farrel wants to return to his birthplace and see if his mother is still alive. Like characters who inhabit other Alonso films—the woodcutter in *LA LIBERTAD* and the convict traversing the jungle in *LOS MUERTOS*—Farrel is a solitary man. He drinks to oblivion, pays the women he sleeps with and has no friends. With a head full of dark memories, he treks through the endless snow, discovering his mother and a part of himself. One of the few living directors whose filmography represents a kind of subgenre, Alonso takes the techniques of observational cinema and invests them with insight and surprisingly wrenching emotion.



NATIVE DANCER

Showcase on Kazakhstan

(Kazakhstan , Russia , France, 2008, 87 mins)

US Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Guka Omarova, Sergei Bodrov

Directed By: Guka Omarova

Cast: Nesipkul Omarbekova, Farkhat Amankulov, Tolepbergen Baisakalov, Almat Ayanov, Asel Abutova

Co-written and produced by the Oscar-nominated Russian director Sergei Bodrov (*MONGOL*), this debut feature by Gulshat Omarova collides two sensibilities—the rough-and-tumble nature of gangsters and the mysticism of witch doctors—in conflict over a piece of real estate. The elderly and wise Aidai (Nesipkul Omarbekova, a real-life witch doctor) dispenses spiritual guidance, provides shelter and heals the ill and lost souls. The land she lives on connects her to her spiritual powers, and she lives on it thanks to the generosity of Batir (Farkhad Amankulov), a wealthy businessman whose wife sought Aidai's help when they were trying to conceive. Lately, Batir has been under pressure to remove Aidai and develop the land. When she resists and then the gas station built by the gangsters on the land accidentally burns down, the mob suspects Batir and retaliates by kidnapping his son. When Batir decides to pursue his son's captors, *NATIVE DANCER* transitions from Aidai's mystical fantasy world into the violent, high-octane world of organized crime. Richly shot on the vast plains of Kazakhstan, Omarova's accomplished, sociologically infused enquiry reveals a culture and nation pulled between ancient tradition and the unstoppable forces of modern capitalist practice.



A NECESSARY DEATH

World Cinema

(USA, 2008, 101 mins)

HDCAM

Screenwriter(s) : Daniel Stamm

Directed By: Daniel Stamm

Cast: Gilbert John, Matt Tilley, Valerie Hurt, Michael Traynor, Konima Parkinson-Jones

Producer: Brian Udovich, GJ Echternkamp

Director of Photography: Zoltan Honti

Editor: Shilpa Khanna, David Kashevaroff

Music: Morgan Kibby, Jonathan Leahy

Sound Design: Andy Hay

www.anecessarydeath.com/

The difficulties facing today's independent filmmakers are immense. In addition to securing financing, mentorship and other support, these artists also need a subject or story worth their time and effort. With exploitation and sensationalism ever more rewarded, how can young artists make a name for themselves? It is in this context that a group of young filmmakers have an incendiary idea: What about filming a person's suicide? Using the popular website Craigslist, they send out a call for proposals. "Documentary filmmaker looking for suicidal individual to follow from first preparation to final act." To their surprise, they receive numerous responses, and they choose a perfect subject. But the arguments don't end there. Exploring, with incisive wit, the growing questions of media ethics in the digital video age, this debut feature by AFI grad Daniel Stamm was shot in and around the AFI campus, highlighting the intensity of every film student's road to discovery. It is an American independent film that should not be missed.

-- Lane Kneidler



NED KELLY - HEATH LEDGER MILESTONE

Milestones

(Australia , UK , USA , France, 2003, 110 mins)

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : John McDonagh, Robert Drewe

Directed By: Gregor Jordan

Cast: Heath Ledger, Orlando Bloom, Geoffrey Rush, Naomi Watts, Laurence Kinlan

Producers: Nelson Woss, Lynda House

Executive Producers: Tim White, Tim Bevan, Eric Fellner

Director of Photography: Oliver Stapleton, Brad Shield

Editor: Jon Grefory

Co Producers: Debra Hayward, Liza Chasin

After making a successful transition to a Hollywood career, Australian-born Heath Ledger returned to his native soil to star in this handsomely mounted 2003 epic directed by his friend Gregor Jordan (TWO HANDS). It's a romanticized version of the history of the notorious 19th-century Kelly Gang that not only permeates Australian legend but also inspired the world's first feature film in 1906 (THE STORY OF THE KELLY GANG). The son of poor Irish immigrants, Ned Kelly was a bushranger outlaw and folk antihero who the movie presents as standing up for the rights of common people (including his family) against British colonial authorities. Inspired by Kelly's famously proud and defiant portrait, Ledger remarked, "I wanted to just find the character, stick to it, and give a consistent performance." In its brooding, silent heroism, his rendering serves as a striking counterpoint to the maniacal glee of his nihilistic Joker in this year's smash hit THE DARK KNIGHT, and attests to Ledger's impressive range. Jordan's stately, somber film is filled with equal parts landscape poetry and rousing Western gun fights, and the film's climactic showdown situates the narrative in clear, genre categories.



NILOOFAR

Narrative Competition

(France , Iran , Lebanon, 2008, 82 mins)

In Farsi & Arabic with English subtitles

35mm

US Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Sabine Gemayel

Directed By: Sabine El Gemayel

Cast: Roya Nownahali, Shahab Hosseini, Hengameh Ghaziani, Mobina Ayenedar, Amir Aghai, Sadegh Safai, Fatemeh Motamed Aria

Producers: Jean Brehat, Rachid Bouchareb, Fereshteh Taerpour

Director of Photography: Bahram Badakhshani

Editor: Bahram Dehghani

Music: Fardin Khalatbari

Co Producer: Fereshteh Taerpour

www.pyramidefilms.com

Niloofar, a 12-year-old Iraqi girl, dreams of reading and writing, but she lives in a village where education is only for boys. Her mother, a well-known midwife, insists that Niloofar become her apprentice. While assisting her mother during a delivery, Niloofar meets a feminist woman who undertakes to educate her in secret. Unfortunately, in exchange of a field of palm trees, Niloofar's father promises her in marriage to an older man once she becomes a woman. Horrified, Niloofar does everything in her power to postpone her first period. Destiny catches up with her, but she continues to hide her womanhood from her community, until one day, the truth is revealed. Rather than live in a marriage without love, Niloofar runs away with her Uncle. Shocked, her family considers itself dishonored and sends her stepbrother to track her down. Award-winning editor Sabine El Gemayel (THE OLIVER HARVEST) proves herself into an accomplished director with her debut film, produced by Jean Brehat and Rachid Bouchareb (DAYS OF GLORY, LITTLE SENEGAL) The captivating young lead Mobina Aynehdar gives a rich performance, demonstrating an emotional range rarely seen in young performers. As it artfully combines the modern and the past, the poignant and the tragic, NILOOFAR emerges as a potent film about growing up female in a place where inequality rules.

-- Shaz Bennett



NIRVANA

Narrative Competition

(Russia, 2008, 89 mins)

In Russian, English with English subtitles

35mm

North American Premiere

Screenwriter(s) : Olga Larionova

Directed By: Igor Voloshin

Cast: Olga Sutulova, Mariya Shalayeva, Arthur Smolyaninov, Mikhail Evlanov

Producer: Sergei Selyanov

Director of Photography: Dmitriy Yashonkov

Editor: Tatjana Kuzmyceva

Alisa leaves Moscow for St. Petersburg, hoping to escape her loneliness. But her quest for love and happiness, coupled with a dangerous, intense connection with her troubled neighbors, threatens to destroy everything she knows. Can she emerge from her own wrecked life and emerge as someone new? This tale of drugs, sex, crime and hipster cool in postcommunist Russia is set against one of the most eye-popping and innovative backdrops in contemporary cinema, the latest visually stunning effort from a Russian cinema in full renaissance. First-time director Igor Voloshin brings his powerful cinematic vision to NIRVANA, a gritty yet brightly colored punk drama that showcases both amazing design—the high-contrast, neonlike sets and costumes are like nothing you've seen before—and insights into the existential crises that seem to echo modern Russia's plight. "Our characters look genuinely extravagant," Voloshin has written. "It's the result of spiritual emptiness." This ingenious, carefully crafted film offers an exciting window into emergent Russian cultural forms.

—Lane Kneedler



NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD

Special Screenings

(Australia, 2008, 100 mins)

35mm

Screenwriter(s) : Mark Hartley

Directed By: Mark Hartley

Featuring: Jamie Lee Curtis, Dennis Hopper, Stacy Keach, Quentin Tarantino, Brian Trenchard-Smith, Steve Railsback

Producers: Michael Lynch, Craig Griffin

Executive Producers: Bruno Charlesworth, Jonathan Shteinman, Paul Weigard, Nick Batzias

Director of Photography: Karl von Moller

Editors: Jamie Blanks, Sara Edwards, Mark Hartley

Music: Stephen Cummings, Billy Miller

Quentin Tarantino, the mad professor of cinematic exploitation, lends his encyclopedic knowledge of genre film to this documentary about the unheralded raunchy, raucous blood-soaked cinema shot in Australia in the '70s and early '80s. It's cult fan base calls it "Ozploitation." Though the images and the ideas may remind you of the biker gang and slasher stories that crowded American drive-ins, these films have an attitude all their own—the cars explode louder, the actors take off all of their clothes, and the stuntmen have no concern for safety whether it's a slasher, smut, action, or kung fu movie. Director Mark Hartley interviews several of the directors, actors and producers of these films, people like Brian Trenchard-Smith, Grant Page, George Miller, Antony I. Ginnane, Barry Humphries, Sigrid Thornton and John Lamond. We also meet some of the Americans who appeared in some of these films, including Stacy Keach and Jamie Lee Curtis. All of these players prove to be as bizarre, funny, unpredictable and unbridled as the movies they made. A tribute to guerilla filmmaking, NOT QUITE HOLLYWOOD is a true homage to the unsung maverick filmmakers of some of the best genre films you've never seen.

—Jacqueline Lyanga