

## Chicago International Film Festival Kicks Off With Tribute to Legendary Critic Roger Ebert

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CHICAGO – Producers, writers and actors all took a backseat on Thursday night as the Chicago International Film Festival kicked off its 43rd year with a moving tribute to legendary film critic Roger Ebert.



Roger Ebert and wife, Chaz Hammelsmith, at the Chicago International Film Festival on Oct. 4, 2007.

*Photo by Evan O'Donnell/HollywoodChicago.com*

The scores of people gathered around the Chicago Theatre were raring to see the major players involved with the making of one of the most anticipated films of the year: "The Kite Runner".

It turns out they didn't become thoroughly animated until they saw Ebert emerge from his car with his faithful wife, Chaz, at his side.

The opening-night celebration for the Chicago International Film Festival (CIFF) paid tribute to the venerable critic – for whom the festival is dedicated and who is now known as the [No. 1 pundit in America](#) [11] – for his decades of work in the film industry.





Opening night of the Chicago International Film Festival paid tribute to Roger Ebert on Oct. 4, 2007.

*Photo by Evan O'Donnell/HollywoodChicago.com*

The ceremony moved inside where a capacity crowd of who's who people – including the chancellor of the University of Illinois, directors, actors and general well wishers – congratulated Ebert on his accomplishments.

The highlight of the night was when Ebert took the stage and spoke a few words with the help of his synthesizer. He has had to use the mechanical voice ever since undergoing surgery to remove thyroid cancer in 2003.



"The Kite Runner" director Marc Forster at the Chicago International Film Festival on Oct. 4, 2007.

*Photo by Evan O'Donnell/HollywoodChicago.com*

Ebert paid homage to HAL from "2001: A Space Odyssey". He was in high spirits and his wife said he is on the road to recovery. She asked the audience to keep him in their prayers as he prepares to undergo the next round of surgeries in November.

A video was presented full of actors and directors congratulating Ebert on his career. It was inspiring how many people talked about him in such warm and glowing terms. Directors including Martin Scorsese and Clint Eastwood talked of how – after all these years – they still seek Ebert's approval.



From left to right, "The Kite Runner" director Marc Forster, author Khaled Hosseini and star Khalid Abdalla at the Chicago International Film Festival on Oct. 4, 2007

*Photo by Evan O'Donnell/HollywoodChicago.com*

Ebert has transcended his role as a film critic to what can only be described now as an ambassador for film. He has changed the way we watch movies and will continue to do so for years to come.

It was a night people in attendance won't soon forget. The evening showed everyone the role of what critics can and should be in the industry. Ebert has done it the right way and has proven himself not only as a film aficionado but as a journalist as well.

By [Evan O'Donnell](#) [12]

Staff Writer

[HollywoodChicago.com](http://HollywoodChicago.com)



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