

13th Annual EU Film Festival Highlights, Week One: ‘The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo,’ ‘Draft Dodgers’

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on March 4, 2010 - 2:01pm

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CHICAGO – Foreign film fans and art house aficionados rejoice! The Annual European Union Film Festival is back at the Siskel Film Center, offering Chicagoans a rare and illuminating journey through contemporary world cinema. Sifting through five dozen titles may prove to be formidable for moviegoers deciding what to see. Let us guide the way.

This year’s edition, running from March 5th to April 1st, includes high profile films from world renowned filmmakers like Peter Greenaway, Jacques Rivette, Neil Jordan, Catherine Breillat, Amos Gital, Bruno Dumont, Jan Hrebejk and Caroline Link. Moviegoers should take note of the fact that several of these titles won’t be screened outside of the EU festival in Chicago, making their appearance here all the more priceless.

The 13th Annual European Union Film Festival includes 59 feature films, all of which are making their Chicago premiere. If you’ve had your fill with Hollywood, or are simply looking for something off of the beaten path, the EU is the fest for you. Week by week, every Thursday, come back to HollywoodChicago.com for the highlights of the upcoming weekend and following week, along with a synopsis for every other film premiering that week.



The Dancer and the Thief

Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

The EU festival kicks off with the annual custom of a celebration presided over by the nation currently holding the presidency of the European Union. On Friday, March 5th, the host is the Honorable Javier Ruperez, Consul General of Spain in Chicago, introducing the festival’s opening night selection, “The Dancer and the Thief.” It is the latest work from Oscar-winning director Fernando Trueba (“Belle Epoque”), as well as the first of nine films at the festival selected to represent their nation in this year’s Best Foreign Language Film competition.



The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo
Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

One of the festival’s hottest tickets is “The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo,” screening at 3pm on Saturday, March 6. This adaptation of Stieg Larsson’s bestselling crime novel is currently Sweden’s highest-grossing film, and an American remake is already in the works. It’s receiving US distribution from Music Box Films, which had great success with another popular thriller, Guillaume Canet’s masterful “Tell No One.” Though “Tattoo,” directed by Niels Arden Oplev, is not quite in the league of Canet’s picture, it’s still a taut, tasty puzzle well worth checking out.

Larsson’s book is the first in his “Millennium” trilogy, and has enough subplots and backstories to fill a miniseries, but screenwriters Nikolaj Arcel and Rasmus Heisterberg wisely keep the film focused on its two magnetic leads. After his publication is accused of libel, journalist Mikael (Michael Nyqvist) decides to investigate a case brought to him by an elderly industrialist, who suspects that his wealthy family did away with his beloved niece forty years ago (her framed face haunts the proceedings like Laura Palmer). The film really catches fire once Mikael joins forces with a mysterious Goth girl (Noomi Rapace), who turns out to be a badass Miss Marple.

Though the film seems overcrowded even at two-and-a-half hours, it’s a supremely entertaining treat. Nyqvist and Rapace are both excellent, and the story is packed with intriguing elements, including a festering Nazism that is shared by several of the festival’s selections this year, many of which explore the Holocaust from fresh perspectives.



Draft Dodgers
Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

A notable example is “Draft Dodgers,” Luxembourg’s official submission for Oscar consideration, which tells a shattering wartime tale that actually might warrant a remake. It’s set in 1944, and centers on the son of a Nazi collaborator, whose beliefs are far removed from those of his father. Leaving his university, where professors lecture about the difference between “Aryans and subhumans,” he’s faced with a choice: either join the German army, or live with a group of deserters in an iron mine. Naturally, the youth decides to head underground, though he finds that friendship is hard to come by, even amongst allies.

The claustrophobic setting is well-envisioned by director Nicholas Steil and cinematographer Denis Jutzeler, though the script is cluttered with cliches. Yet there are enough agonizing moments to keep attention rapt, leading to a climactic moment of violence that is truly devastating (it makes one yearn for Tarantino’s Basterds). The film screens on Monday, March 8th at 6pm and Wednesday, March 10th at 8pm.

Looking for some laughter with your violence? Look no further than “The Bone Man,” a diabolical delight from Austria that’s like “Delicatessen” meets the Coen Brothers, with a dash of “The Crying Game.” It marks comedian Josef Hader’s third portrayal of bumbling

private eye Simon Brenner, under the direction of his longtime collaborator, Wolfgang Murnberger. Stumbling through a slanted, glassy gray landscape expertly lensed by cinematographer Peter Von Haller, Brenner becomes fed up with his job repossessing cars, and escapes to the countryside. He stops at a deceptively unexceptional inn, and ends up finding a whole lot more than he bargained for.

You'll be hard-pressed to find a more enjoyable film at the EU festival this year. Though it delves into some unapologetically gruesome subject matter, director Murnberger never loses his mischievous humor or sense of playfulness. It's suspenseful, funny and sublimely well-acted. Catch it on Saturday, March 6th at 9:15pm or Monday, March 8th at 7:45pm.



Mid-August Lunch

Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

Moviegoers who aren't intent on losing their lunch are advised to savor the appetizing aroma of Italy's latest internationally acclaimed crowd-pleaser. It's "Mid-August Lunch," the work of two filmmakers who previously collaborated on the brilliant crime epic "Gomorrah." Writer/director Gianni Di Gregorio plays a middle-aged "Marty"-type, who's unemployed and lives with his elderly mother (the charming Valeria De Franciscis, who occasionally resembles Abe Vigoda in a blonde wig). As the August holiday of Ferragosto approaches, the dutiful son finds himself playing innkeeper to a houseful of old ladies, who are feisty, snippy, hungry, and in one case, horny.

What follows isn't quite the screwball farce one might expect. Instead, Di Gregorio takes a quietly observant, documentary-style approach to the material, immersing the audience within his characters' warmly inviting, enclosed environment. It's a tender, even mild, vignette with richly authentic flavor. The film will be served only once, on Saturday, March 6th at 5:45pm (it's the perfect prelude to an Italian dinner).

These four highlights are well worth seeking out, though there is still plenty more to choose from this week, including two films featuring the latest work from Irish filmmaker Neil Jordan. He makes an appearance in Ian FitzGibbon's acclaimed dark comedy, "A Film With Me In It," as well as directs the fantastical drama "Ondine" (starring Colin Farrell). Here is the rest of the line-up for week one, in order of appearance...

"The Dancer and the Thief," Spain, Fernando Trueba

Friday, March 5, 6:00 pm

Thursday, March 11, 8:00 pm

Synopsis: "Spain's Academy Award submission, THE DANCER AND THE THIEF marks the first fiction film in eight years for Oscar-winning director Trueba (BELLE EPOQUE). Set in post-Pinochet Chile and based on an acclaimed novel by Antonio Skármeta ("Il Postino"), this atmospheric blend of crime story and fairy tale moves from the teeming streets of Santiago to the snow-capped peaks of the Andes as it brings together a veteran safecracker, a high-spirited young horse thief, and a mute ballerina—each wounded by the past and pursuing elusive dreams. In Spanish with English subtitles. 35mm widescreen."

"Forbidden Fruit," Finland, Dome Karukoski

Saturday, March 6, 3:15 pm

Tuesday, March 9, 8:00 pm

Synopsis: "The Laestadian community, a fundamentalist Lutheran sect that is a major force in Finnish society, provides a fascinating backdrop for this coming-of age story. Experience-hungry teenager Maria (Pilke) runs off to the big city to taste all the forbidden fruits (sex, alcohol, movies). Her devout friend Raakel (Maristo) is dispatched to bring her back to the fold, but, as she discovers, purity isn't necessarily the strongest armor against temptation. Director Karukoski maintains a remarkably nonjudgmental tone, laced with dry humor and bittersweet irony. In Finnish with English subtitles. 35mm print courtesy of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland."

"The Hunt," Latvia, Andis Miziss

Saturday, March 6, 5:45 pm

Wednesday, March 10, 8:15 pm

Synopsis: "A congenial country bar is ground zero for four open-ended stories that come to center on the town cop as the missing link in the cryptic narrative. A hunting party sets out on an early fall morning while an irritable delivery man adds a lethal ingredient to a shipment of local brew, marathon runners get lost in the woods, and a home for unwed mothers based in a railroad car makes its daily pass along the tracks. Chance is the determining factor in this surreal story, and director Miziss has a knack for maintaining a magical edge. In Latvian with English subtitles. HDCAM video courtesy of the National Film Center of Latvia."



Ondine

Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

"Ondine," Ireland/USA, Neil Jordan

Saturday, March 6, 7:15 pm

Wednesday, March 10, 6:00 pm

Synopsis: "The Celtic myth of the selkie—the seal able to shed her sleek coat and appear on land in human form—comes in for an interpretation reminiscent of the earthbound magic of Jordan's early fairytale feature *The Company Of Wolves*. Soulfully hunky Colin Farrel is Syracuse, the lone fisherman who hauls in an ethereally beautiful but seemingly dead woman in his net. Their story follows an ancient pattern, with bounty from the sea, a miracle, and the arrival of a lord of the deep, come to reclaim his lover from the human interloper. The cinematography is by Christopher Doyle, renowned for his work with Wong Kar-wai. In English. Special advance screening courtesy of Magnolia Pictures. HDCAM video."

"Hooked," Romania, Adrian Sitaru

Saturday, March 6, 7:30 pm

Thursday, March 11, 8:15 pm

Synopsis: "A couple meeting up for an adulterous tryst in the country has the day thrown off course when their car hits a prostitute on a lonely road. They conspire to hide the body, but the woman is far from dead. Guilty consciences are hushed by treating her as a guest at their picnic, but the sly and seemingly naive victim has an agenda of her own, playing the two against each other. The dynamic of a lazy day around the fishing hole slowly begins to change. In Romanian with English subtitles. 35mm print courtesy of Rezo."



A Film With Me In It

Photo credit: Siskel Film Center

"A Film With Me In It," Ireland, Ian FitzGibbon

Saturday, March 6, 9:30 pm
Monday, March 8, 6:00 pm

Synopsis: "Mark, an out-of-work Dublin actor with every aspect of his penniless life imploding, has an unfortunate accident in his apartment one morning. It results in a body, which soon results in another. In short order, girlfriend, landlord, paraplegic brother, and best friend are neatly yet inadvertently disposed of, leaving Mark scratching his head. Director FitzGibbon's dry but hilariously over-the-top comedy springs from the tradition of absurd Irish humor calculated to render viewers helpless with laughter, with or without the help of a drink or two. In English. Special advance screening courtesy of IFC Films. 35mm."

"French Gigolo," France, Josiane Balasko

Sunday, March 7, 3:00 pm
Thursday, March 11, 6:00 pm

Synopsis: "Self-sufficient businesswoman Judith (Baye, excellent as usual) likes her sex efficient and impersonal, and she isn't shy about hiring escorts to get it. But things get atypically messy when she becomes involved with a personable gigolo (Caravaca) who is keeping his source of income secret from his loving wife (Isabel Carré). Actor-director Balasko (FRENCH TWIST), who also has a juicy role as Judith's telemarketing sister, displays a gift for balancing comedy with drama and for handling provocative subject-matter without moralism. In French with English subtitles. Special advance screening courtesy of IFC Films. DigiBeta video."

"Modus Operandi," Belgium, Hugues Lanneau

Sunday, March 7, 3:15 pm
Tuesday, March 9, 6:00 pm

Synopsis: "This remarkable documentary examines in detail the mechanics of the Holocaust in one small nation, questioning how it was possible for a handful of Nazis to organize the deportation of 25,000 Belgian Jews, of which only 1,200 survived. Utilizing a wealth of previously unseen film footage, photographs, and documents, director Lanneau painstakingly reconstructs Nazi strategies and methods that drew scores of both unwitting and voluntary collaborators into the destructive plan. In French with English subtitles. DigiBeta video courtesy of Les Films de la Mémoire."

"El Paso," Czech Republic, Zdenek Tyc

Monday, March 8, 8:00 pm
Wednesday, March 10, 6:00 pm

Synopsis: "Based on a true story, EL PASO puts Vera (Horvatha, an emotional dynamo), a widowed welfare mother with a brood of seven kids she is in danger of losing, at the center of a turf war between an ambitious young lawyer anxious to impress her boss with a pro bono project, and a serious but unorthodox social worker. Raw emotion is the order of the day, as Vera, a woman of the Roma subculture, faces the non-Gypsy world with a towering anger largely justified by the prejudice and condescension that even her would-be helpers can't hide. In Czech with English subtitles. Special advance screening courtesy of courtesy of Menemsha Films, Inc. 35mm."



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