

Film News: Lineup Announced For 2011 Toronto International Film Festival

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CHICAGO – With a tremendously promising awards season in the very near future, it's only natural that the 2011 Toronto International Film Festival would feature an embarrassment of riches. A whopping 268 feature films and 68 shorts are scheduled to screen at the 36th edition of TIFF, which runs from September 8th through the 18th. Here are a few of the highlights.

As expected, many of the fall season's biggest titles will have their hotly anticipated premieres, such as George Clooney's "The Ides of March," Alexander Payne's "The Descendants," Jonathan Levine's "50/50" and David Hare's "Page Eight." A series of previous festival favorites will also be screened before their eventual theatrical release, including several award winners at Cannes and Sundance. Nicolas Winding Refn's "Drive" promises to feature a startlingly sinister performance by beloved comedian and filmmaker Albert Brooks. He plays a criminal in hot pursuit of a stunt driver (Ryan Gosling) with unwise connections to the underworld. Drake Doremus's "Like Crazy" was the Grand Prize winner at Sundance and tells the bittersweet tale of a semi-autobiographical long-distance romance. Michel Hazanavicius's voiceless gem "The Artist" centers on a silent movie star (Jean Dujardin) facing the emergence of talkies, while Lars von Trier's visionary drama revolves around a newlywed (Kirsten Dunst) facing the end of the world.

Movie buffs will be especially enticed to peruse through the list of new works from many of the world's most important directors. "Werckmeister Harmonies" maestro Béla Tarr returns with "The Turin Horse," "Titticut Follies" documentarian Frederick Wiseman visits a Parisian nightclub in "Crazy Horse," and "Happiness" provocateur Todd Solondz presents his latest controversial satire, "Dark Horse." The tirelessly prolific Werner Herzog investigates a triple homicide case in the appropriately titled "Into the Abyss" (which could be the title of every Herzog film). Mumblecore star-turned-mainstream character actress Greta Gerwig is among the youthful cast members in "Damsels in Distress," the first feature directed by Whit Stillman since 1998's "The Last Days of Disco." With his latest narrative comedy slated for a December release, Cameron Crowe returns to his journalistic roots in the music documentary, "Pearl Jam Twenty." Other highlights include Pedro Almodóvar's "The Skin I Live In," Francis Ford Coppola's "Twixt," Johnnie To's "Life Without Principle" and Jonathan Demme's New Orleans doc, "I'm Carolyn Parker: The Good, the Mad and the Beautiful."



Kirsten Dunst stars in Lars von Trier's Melancholia.

Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures

Many of the strongest titles pair collaborators from past cinematic treasures. The writing/directing team behind 2007's "Persepolis," Marjane Satrapi and Vincent Paronnaud, join forces for "Chicken with Plums," a drama that chronicles the life and decline of a violin player in Tehran. Glenn Close re-teams with director Rodrigo Garcia for the third time in "Albert Nobbs," an adaptation of the 1982 play that featured Close as an Englishwoman who disguises herself as a male butler. Guy Maddin and Isabella Rossellini make their signature surrealistic magic in "Keyhole," while Michael Fassbender and director Steve McQueen follow up their galvanizing 2008 masterwork, "Hunger," with a film about a NYC sex addict entitled, "Shame." After garnering a great deal of critical praise for their woefully overlooked 2009 drama, "The Messenger," Woody Harrelson, Ben Foster and director Oren Moverman are back in action with the police drama, "Rampart."

There are so many films bursting with talent and potential that it's easy for some of them to get lost in the shuffle. Here are a few shout-outs to some of the festival's other noteworthy premiers. Indie sensations Lynn Shelton ("Humpday") and Mark and Jay Duplass ("Cyrus") unveil their latest respective projects: "Your Sister's Sister" and "Jeff, Who Lives at Home." Sarah Polley ("Away From Her") takes another look at long-term relationships in "Take this Waltz," starring Michelle Williams and Seth Rogen. On the heels of their summer hit "Bridesmaids," Kristen Wiig and Maya Rudolph are back for more laughs in Jennifer Westfeldt's adult comedy, "Friends With Kids." "Blair Witch Project" co-director Eduardo Sanchez aims to chill audiences again in "Lovely Molly," while Morgan Spurlock sets his sights on the cultural phenomenon of ultra-geek conventions in "Comic-Con Episode IV: A Fan's Hope." Last but not least, the always entertaining Bobcat Goldthwait points a scathingly satirical eye at our national discontent in "God Bless America." Even if it's only a tenth as funny as "Windy City Heat," it still has a shot at being the must-see comedy of the year.

For more information on the 2011 Toronto International Film Festival, visit <http://tiff.net/thefestival> [12].