

Preview: 47th Chicago International Film Festival, Part Three

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on October 14, 2011 - 2:16pm

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CHICAGO – Illness has kept us from truly screening a majority of the films left to screen at the 47th Annual Chicago International Film Festival but there are three that we did get around to in the last month that are definitely worth your time, plus a handful of highlights that we wish we could have gotten to see that might draw your interest. Here’s the best of the last-third of the fest, films debuting October 15th-20th.

There’s only three but two are among the best films of the year and the third is a very-interesting curiosity — “The Artist,” “The Descendants,” and “Sleeping Beauty.”



“The Artist”
October 20th, 7pm

You’re going to be reading a LOT about this year’s Closing Night Presentation in the coming months as The Weinstein Company is going to put all of their Oscar weight behind this lovely gem of a film, one of those rare movies that defies categorization. “The Artist” is not only about the silent film era but it is itself a silent film. In a sure-to-be-nominated lead performance, Jean Dujardin (from the “OSS 117” movies) plays the legendary George Valentine. As the world of silent movies gives way to the talkie, he watches the starlet he found (Berenice Bejo) take his place on the national stage. The film features supporting work from Penelope Ann Miller, John Goodman, Missi Pyle, and James Cromwell and won Dujardin the acting prize at this year’s Cannes Film Festival. Oscar nods for Picture, Actor, and several tech categories seem virtually guaranteed. You can say you saw it before the bandwagon got crowded. Consistently inventive, heartfelt, and mesmerizing, “The Artist” reminds one of the visual power of the medium. It’s always been about the moving picture and “The Artist” is an amazing love letter to cinema, old and new.





The Descendants

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“The Descendants”**

October 18th, 8:45pm

Alexander Payne hasn't released a film since “Sideways” and early reports out of Toronto and Telluride were that his first effort since that Oscar winner didn't live up to the standards of its filmmaker's resume. Nonsense. This is one of Payne's best films, one that history will prove should stand beside his best work. George Clooney delivers arguably the best performance of his career as a man whose wife ends up on life support and forces him to reassess his own. Not only does he need to get closer to his daughters (including a stellar breakthrough performance from Shailene Woodley) but he learns that his wife was cheating on him. Meanwhile, he's forced to decide what to do with massive amount of family land that his cousins want to sell. Payne, Nat Faxon, & Jim Rash's stellar script is the real star here, gently telling the story of a man faced with major life decisions. There are several scenes here, including more than one at the hospital and an amazing one in which Clooney first confronts his wife's lover, that stand among the most well-crafted of the year. Delicate without being melodramatic, “The Descendants” is a beauty. One of the most memorable films of 2011.



Sleeping Beauty

*Photo credit: The Chicago International Film Festival***“Sleeping Beauty”**

October 16th, 8:10pm

October 17th, 8:30pm

Speaking of memorable, you won't soon forget Julia Leigh's controversial “Sleeping Beauty,” a disturbing take on the classic legend. Emily Browning (“Sucker Punch”) gives a daring performance as a woman who finds employment with a company that provides, well, unique sexual services. At first, she is merely the wine pourer at parties where old men chat over dinner as half-naked women bring them food. After doing well enough in that position, she graduates to a new one. As needed, she is drugged, stripped, and put to sleep in a lavish bedroom. What happens then is up to the client but penetration is not allowed. Some just want to sleep next to a beautiful woman. Some want to do much worse. “Sleeping Beauty” isn't a perfect film and I wish it was directed by a filmmaker who could have brought it a bit more personality (it's surprisingly sterile), but it will provide ample food for thought and discussion after you see it. In some respects, that's what we go to a film festival for — something to talk about.

Click to the next page for unscreened highlights — films we wish we could see in the final week of the fest.

All synopses courtesy of the film festival.

“Amador”

October 16th, 1:45pm
October 17th, 8:15pm

Marcela’s pregnancy couldn’t have come at a worse time. A Latin American immigrant living in the outskirts of Madrid, Marcela is stuck in a stagnant relationship with a man who works a dead-end job selling flowers. Things begin to improve when she’s hired to care for a friend’s ailing father, Amador. When Amador suddenly dies, leaving her jobless, Marcela is faced with an unusual moral dilemma in this heartfelt drama about life and death.

“Butter”

October 19th, 8pm

A tale of competition at its most cutthroat, Butter surveys the raw ambition of Laura Pickler (Jennifer Garner), the wife of Bob Pickler (Ty Burrell), Iowa’s long-reigning champion butter carver. For 15 years, Laura has relished her high-profile role as the beautiful, loyal helpmate to her affable, artistically gifted husband. But when Bob is pressured to retire and allow someone else a chance at glory, an indignant Laura decides to enter the competition herself. In the tradition of Best In Show and Election, Butter can be enjoyed as a straightforward, albeit merrily twisted, comedy about American life and culture.

“The Good Doctor”

October 16th, 4:30pm

In this dark thriller that skewers modern medical practice and its morals, first-year resident Dr. Martin Blake (Orlando Bloom) strives to be a “good doctor”. Willing to do whatever it takes to succeed, he has the perfect opportunity to further his ambition when a young beautiful patient is assigned to his care. When the determined doctor unexpectedly falls prey to the seductive charms of his ward, he must choose between hypocrisy and the Hypocratic Oath

“Into the Abyss”

October 17th, 7:30pm

With only eight days before he’s put to death, Michael Perry’s interview while on Death Row in Texas is not intended as a plea to abolish the death penalty, but rather as an entry into the philosophical underpinnings of death and violence in a country that has not yet done away with state sanctioned executions. Perennial fan favorite and patron saint of daring cinema, Werner Herzog’s latest documentary takes us once again into realms far removed from everyday experience to bring back the extraordinary.

“The Mole”

October 14th, 3pm
October 16th, 5:30pm
October 18th, 6:20pm

Pawel and his father Zygmunt make a living importing second hand clothing from France to Poland. When Zygmunt is suddenly and publicly accused of being a past Communist informant, he flees the country leaving the stubbornly apolitical Pawel to pick up the pieces and face the pervading legacy of Poland’s troubled past. With strong performances and sympathetic characters, The Mole candidly explores how the weight of history affects a son’s love for his family and his motherland.

“Natural Selection”

October 15th, 8:40pm
October 16th, 3:45pm

Linda’s devoutly religious husband Abe hasn’t slept with her since he found out she was barren. That was 20 years ago. But when Abe suffers a stroke she finds out that his sexual needs were long being taken care of at the local sperm bank. And that he has a mullet-headed ex-con son named Raymond. Linda goes to Florida to meet Raymond and the pair embark on a journey of self-discovery in this offbeat, darkly funny road movie that was a big winner at this year’s SXSW Film Festival.

“Play”

October 16th, 3pm
October 17th, 5:30pm
October 18th, 2:15pm

Based on real cases of bullying in Sweden, Play incisively delves into a children’s world ruled by intimidation and manipulation while delivering a nuanced commentary on race relations. When three boys are falsely accused of stealing a cell phone by older boys from immigrant African families, the latter assert their dominance through elaborate role play and gang rhetoric. What follows is an alarmingly tense game that no adult could dare to win.

“Sadermania”

October 15th, 6:15pm

Calling all Hulkamaniacs! When you’re done training, taking your vitamins, and saying your prayers, then you can meet the purest fan of all, Chris Sader, in a story that travels from childhood obsession to an unexpected and touching friendship. In this inspirational tale, Chris and Hulk Hogan relate how they met and developed a bond through mutual struggles and personal loss that each would have faced alone if not for

the unlikely friendship that develops between them.

“Sleep”

October 16th, 8:50pm
October 18th, 8:10pm

Equal parts revenge tale and family drama, Sleep examines the lengths people will go to exact retribution. Raped 17 years ago as a teenager, Kotono now makes a living as a masseuse, leading a nomadic life with her daughter Natsume (born out of the rape) and her aging father. Living out of the back of a van, the clan share a tender bond, each looking out for the needs of the others, belying the perversity of their lifestyle and the true motivation for their life on the road.

“Target”

October 17th, 8:10pm
October 18th, 8:50pm

The year is 2020. The place, Russia. Four members of the country’s elite go out in search of the fountain of youth in this sci-fi take on Anna Karenina. Their goal is a secret military science facility that guards and administers the secret to eternal life which happens to also include an amped up sex drive. Throw in goggles that measure the good and evil in a person and this lurid, highly stylized, near giddy Russian production is sure to become a cult hit.

“Three Musketeers”

October 16th, 5pm

They are known as Porthos, Athos, and Aramis - three elite warriors who serve the King of France as his best Musketeers. After discovering an evil conspiracy to overthrow the King, the Musketeers come across a young, aspiring hero - D’Artagnan - and take him under their wing. Together, the four embark on a dangerous mission to foil the plot that not only threatens the Crown, but the future of Europe itself in this big-screen action adventure update of the Alexandre Dumas’ novel shot in state-of-the-art 3D.



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